

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

*His Life and Work*

by

William Belmont Parker





To

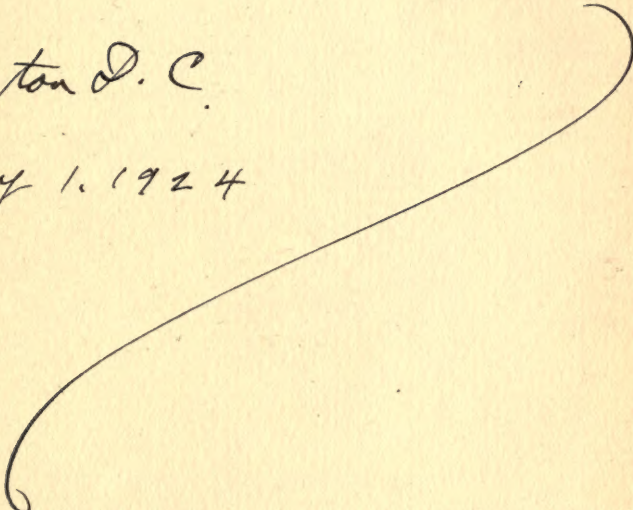
Ernest F. Roddington


with sincere and cordial regards.

William B. Parker

Washington D. C.

May 1, 1924





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**EDWARD ROWLAND SILL**  
**HIS LIFE AND WORK**









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BY

WILLIAM BELMONT PARKER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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**TO MY FATHER**





## PREFACE

It is more than ten years since, in a burst of enthusiasm and admiration, I undertook to prepare a "Life" of Sill. Enthusiasm and admiration have continued unabated, but circumstances interposed to delay the work; not, I am now inclined to think, to its detriment. Had I gone forward unimpeded, working out the plan I then had in mind, the result would have been different, partaking of the nature of essay and criticism. But midway of my task I fell under the influence of that great master of the art of biography, Sir Leslie Stephen, whose dicta upon the subject changed the course I was taking. "Nobody," said he, "ever wrote a dull autobiography"; and he added, "The biographer can never quite equal the autobiographer, but with a sufficient supply of letters he may approach very closely to the same result." About the same time a saying of Sill's, which I had probably read half a dozen times without seeing its application to the matter in hand, came home to me and reinforced the remarks of Sir Leslie, — "Let a man write about himself. It's the only fellow he knows anything about." These have been my sailing

orders. Though Sill's letters are not so abundant as a biographer working on this principle might wish, they are not wanting except for brief periods, and so far as available they have been most generously placed at my disposal by Sill's family and friends.

My obligations, therefore, are many and serious. My most grateful thanks are due to Mrs. Sill, not only for materials, but also for wise counsel and coöperation. To Sill's classmates at Yale, Mr. Henry Holt and Franklin B. Dexter, as also to Miss Millicent W. Shinn, of California, I acknowledge a debt of gratitude. Among many others to whom I am beholden for letters, recollections, and aid are Miss Heloise E. Hersey, Mr. Howells, and Professor Royce, and, to add those who are no longer living, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Daniel C. Gilman, and Ralph O. Williams, Yale, '61.

W. B. P.

*January 15, 1915.*

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# EDWARD ROWLAND SILL

## I

### ANCESTRY AND YOUTH

LIKE most American men of letters the author of "Opportunity" and "The Fool's Prayer" was a native of New England. He was born on April 29, 1841, in Windsor, affectionately called "Ancient Windsor," Connecticut, where his parents, his grandparents, and forbears, reaching back to the foundation of the colony, had lived before him, one of his ancestors being the first minister of the church there from 1630 to 1670. His ancestry included some of the best stocks of New England — Walcotts, Grants, Edwardses, Ellsworths, Rowlands, Allyns; and one who was curious in such matters might trace his descent to Sir Thomas Ware, Knight, of Yorkshire, member of Parliament in 1613, and auditor-general of Ireland, or, even farther back, to Sir Nicholas Pyncheon, of Wales, Sheriff of London in 1532.

There is an allusion to this Welsh strain in his ancestry, which had a sort of fascination



for Sill, in a fragment of imaginative prose on "Can Tunes be Inherited?"

"I have Welsh blood in my family, far back on my mother's side. By some freak of heredity the music of my Welsh ancestors has come down through six, eight, or ten generations, as a dormant germ, and come to life again — a dim, somnolent, imperfect life, to be sure — in a corner of my brain. I could almost fancy (though this I do not soberly believe, for it is explicable in other ways) that there has come down with it a visual picture of wild torchlight marchings and countermarchings in savage Welsh glens. So plainly do I see in my brain . . . visions that befit this strange, barbaric music.

"I see mountain gorges at night. . . . Wind-ing along the pass comes a procession of my Keltic ancestors: it is a burial or some savage midnight gathering against the Saxon invader. Red torches flare in the midst of their smoke; some indistinct dark mass is borne among the leaders: and now and then there are metallic gleams along the vanishing line. They are small, dark men, half clothed in skins of beasts, and their wild eyes shine under streaming locks of black hair. A mountain stream beside them flashes its white bursts of foam out of the darkness under the crags, and continually there rises and mingles with its

roar that fierce yet woeful music, half shouted and half sung."

Coming down to later times: An ancestor to whom Sill was often compared was the Reverend David Sherman Rowland, who was born in Fairfield in 1719, graduated from Yale in 1743, and became at once pastor over the church in Northwest Simsbury, now Granby, Connecticut. He was a man of high spirit and marked independence of character. When, in 1747, he went to be pastor of the church at Plainfield, Connecticut, he found some opposition to his installation, and thereupon, calling together two or three ministers, installed himself. In 1762, he became pastor of the Presbyterian or Congregational church in Providence, where he ranked among the leading clergymen of the day, and had a notable part in the struggle then beginning for independence. So conspicuous was he on the side of the colonists, and so obnoxious to the British, that when the town of Providence was invested, he was obliged to make his escape with his family in a sloop, getting away under cover of night through the midst of the enemy's fleet. Later he settled at Windsor, Connecticut, and became pastor of the church, which was the oldest Evangelical church in America, and with the exception of the Southwark church, London, the oldest orthodox Congregational church in the world.

His son, the Reverend Henry Augustus Rowland, Sill's grandfather, became a colleague with his father in the Windsor church in 1790, and served as pastor until the year of his death in 1835.

On his father's side, Sill was descended from a race of physicians and surgeons. During the Revolutionary War, his ancestor, Dr. Elisha Noyes Sill, served with General Walcott's brigade at Saratoga, and later in Captain Spalding's troop, and was surgeon to the Connecticut troops during Burgoyne's invasion. Sill's father, Dr. Theodore Sill, and *his* father before him, were physicians in Windsor, where his mother's father and grandfather were ministers. These two strains, minister and doctor, mingled in Sill's character rather curiously, and give some explanation to the conflicting tendencies of his life. His father was one of the most beloved physicians of his time, and his visits were so welcome that it was said that some of the children of the town were suspected of playing sick so as to have Dr. Sill to tend them. It was from his mother, Elizabeth Newberry Rowland, that Sill inherited his brown hair and dark gray eyes: for he was decidedly a Rowland in appearance. She is described as a handsome woman with a certain stateliness of manner, and much natural distinction, and is still remembered as an intellectual, quiet



BIRTHPLACE OF EDWARD R. SILL, WINDSOR, CONNECTICUT





woman, fond of the few good books of the day, with a special love for poetry and a tendency to melancholy.

A classmate writes that Sill told him that this came to her son as an aversion from strangers and especially from crowds, but that Sill, recognizing it, overcame it in his later years.

His father's house was the wide, low-built white house, shaded by a tall tree, that looks obliquely across the green toward the old church where ancestors both on the maternal and the paternal side had ministered. Here Sill's childhood was spent, until the death of his mother, when he was eleven, loosed the ties which bound his father to Windsor, and led to their removal to the West. There in little more than a year his father died also, leaving the boy of thirteen alone with no nearer relatives than uncles, aunts, and cousins. Shadowed though his youth was by family sorrows, which must have added to his naturally serious bent, — first the loss of his only brother, drowned while skating on the Connecticut River when Sill was six years old, the death of his mother, five years later, followed so soon by the death of his father, — the boy does not seem ever to have been morose or melancholy. In fact the only anecdotes, if they deserve to be called such, which are recalled of his early years, both point

to an abundance of spirit which, along with an underlying seriousness, marked him all his life.

One of these refers to his flying a kite on the day when he had just got a new straw hat. The wind being high and the kite needing more ballast, he took off the new hat, poked a hole through the rim, tied it to the tail of the kite, and up it went, somewhat to the horror of his careful aunt. The other scrap, which appears to belong to the year he spent at Honesdale, Pennsylvania, relates the capitulation of a teacher, indicated as probably Pennsylvania Dutch by the dialect, who, having resisted as long as he could the boy's infectious spirit, broke out, "Vell, Sill, I dink den you vas dying, you be making foolishness." This irrepressible playfulness of mood he seems never to have lost: it was one of the qualities which he had in common with Matthew Arnold whom he resembled in many points, and calls to mind Herbert Paul's remark about Arnold, that he had a constant flow of high spirits which he never took the least effort to restrain.

Equally slight are the glimpses of his boyhood given by Sill himself. A hint of his comfortable bringing-up, and a stronger intimation of his highly sensitive nervous organization, are given in a sentence or two from an unsigned essay in the "Atlantic Monthly." "The one daily torture of my own otherwise kindly

handled childhood was the going to bed in the dark. I hated the dark, and have always hated it. Why could not some softly shaded light have been left for me to go to sleep by, and then withdrawn, instead of crashing down on my wide-awake eyes that horrible club of blackness?"

Of veritable boyhood and daylight are these passing glimpses: —

"As I go on in life, I find that two or three of the child's great spectacles still keep for me their freshness. One of these is the elephant leading the circus procession through the village street. I never could see it enough, that huge, unearthly shape, moving solemnly along; flapping its wings of ears not for common and mundane fly-guards, but in some mysterious gesture or ceremonial; bending its architectural legs in the wrong place; waving its trunk in incantation; seeing none of the trivial street matters to right or left, but absorbed in Oriental dreams. I used to think it strange that people who were rich enough should not have one always pacing about their own backyards.

"Another of these spectacles of childhood that keeps its charm for me is the locomotive at full speed. . . . But the sight in which I still take the most childlike delight is the spring bonfire. . . . The offending sticks and straws of last year's garden life are gathered together



into dry and light-tossed piles. Now the eager child is permitted, if he is good, the untold felicity of setting off the bonfire.

"I am thinking of the early spring mornings in boyhood, when we used to go to the Little River to take up the gill-net for shad. A mist hung on the smoothly running water; there was an 'Oriental fragrancy' of spearmint from the moist bank; the rattle of the oar in the rowlock sounded preternaturally loud, echoing under the covered bridge at that perfectly silent hour. Then we boys begin to lift the strained top line of the net, pulling the skiff along by means of it, in a moment of delicious excitement. What is that dim spot of glimmering gold, far down in the dark waters? It grows, as we eagerly haul on the line, and the little waves plashed out by the boat make it waver and break, till it seems some huge and splendid prize like the mysterious casket in the net of the Arabian fisherman."

These are village glimpses — and of a New England village, such as Windsor was when Sill was growing up there sixty years ago. The staid, frugal, dignified village with its two or three hundred inhabitants was an almost ideal place for children to grow up in. The Sills' house was one of the pleasantest in the village.

Sill's childhood here is not difficult to reconstruct in fancy, but the years which lie between the death of his mother, when he was eleven,

and his admission to Yale at sixteen, are blurred. Part of his time was spent at his uncle's in Cuyahoga Falls, near Cleveland, Ohio, where he met his two girl cousins and formed an attachment for one of them, his cousin Elizabeth Sill, which ultimately led to his marriage. After nearly two years in Ohio, Sill went to spend another year with an uncle at Honesdale, Pennsylvania, and following that spent a year at Phillips Exeter Academy completing his preparation for college. It is rather singular that one who was to take so active an interest in literary pursuits in college should have given no sign of such interest during his years of preparation. The one recollection which has been evoked of him at Exeter is that he was called "Little Sill."

Yet it is to this period that certain fugitive jottings of reminiscence belong which appear in his "Prose" and show a certain feeling for books and their contents. So he opens the little essay on "The Most Pathetic Figure in Story": "When I was a boy, the fate of Evangeline the Acadian always seemed to me the most piteous of all that I had ever known. Not so much at the end, — the woefulness of that finding of her lover *too late* did not impress me so much till those words had taken on their deeper meaning from the experience of life; but the perpetual disappointment, the hope, not

crushed and ended, but continually revived, only to be the 'hope deferred that maketh the heart sick,' — this seemed to me the pity of it."

The second fragment belongs to the same sensitive and responsive boyhood, possibly to the year spent at Exeter: "It was in a Virgil class, and I was a poor little palpitating new scholar. While I was anxiously construing the opening lines of the Dido-in-the-storm episode, the beetle-browed master turned slyly to a privileged older pupil with some *sotto voce* schoolmaster's joke. As I glanced up, having partly heard the words without catching the point, he was just turning back to me, with a most genial and winning smile sweetening his usually acid features. Innocently, and no doubt with some timidly responsive look on my face, I said, 'What?' But on the instant of speaking I divined that, alas! the grin was not meant for me. . . . He bade me in a stern voice to 'go on.' It was much as if he had cried, 'What right have *you* to be smiling at me, you miserable little sinner?'"

The third scrap of reminiscence may possibly belong to his early college days — say the Freshman year, when we are prone to writing things down in Commonplace Books and the like: —

"I began, when a boy, to keep an *index*



EDWARD R. SILL, 1853





*rerum*. It never got farther than a beautifully arranged table of contents, and a few scattering entries made while the volume had the nutritious fragrance of the bindery still upon it. Among these entries, on a page headed *Similitudes*, are two similes, in very yellow ink. Now the interesting point is that I have totally forgotten whether they were original or selected. I *hope* they were my own; but they sound more as if they might have come from Longfellow's 'Hyperion,' or from some 'Conversation' of Landor's. It may be that every schoolboy (except myself) will recognize and locate them. . . . Here they are: 'This earthly life is like an album at an inn: we turn over its pages curiously or wearily, and write a scrap of wisdom or of folly, and away.' 'He who has loved and served an art is like the child that was nursed by Persephone: he is not subject to the woes of other men, for he has lain in the lap and on the bosom of a goddess.'"

## II

### HIS LIFE AT COLLEGE

SILL entered Yale in his seventeenth year, a moderately tall, slender youth decidedly handsome, with brown hair, gray eyes, and the stamp of personality which marked him off at once from the crowd. "We have n't got much of a class," wrote one of his classmates (Governor Baldwin) in his diary, "but Sill is somewhat of a genius, to be sure." Before the middle of the Freshmen year this was the accepted view of him. At the first trials of literary ability — the class song competition — Sill was seen to be easily first, and he soon took a special place among his classmates, which he kept. He was no athlete, and far from being the jovial good fellow, but he took his part in the sports and amusements of the college, played a creditable game of baseball, and held his own in the little world of the campus. The accounts given of him by his contemporaries indicate that he led a free, open life, never unduly hampered by college rules and regulations, reading a good deal in a desultory fashion, and, like Lowell at Harvard, getting rusticated for neglect of college exercises. It is entered upon the records

that at the end of the Freshman year the Faculty voted that "E. R. Sill ('61) for neglecting his studies shall be removed from college." He was away over a year. Twenty-five years later, when writing to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, then editor of the "Atlantic," he remarked: "Let me confess, since I *am* addressing you personally, that while I preach college, and believe in it, I was myself a reckless student. In fact, I was on the retired list for a considerable part of the course because I *wouldn't* pursue the curriculum, and *would* pursue literature." An instance of his somewhat cavalier attitude toward class routine is recalled by a classmate. It was the custom of the professor of Greek to call upon members of the class to rise and read aloud passages of the text, giving beat, stress, and cæsura. To this exercise, called "scanning," Sill had a strong distaste, and among the reasons for his rustication was his response, a response given with an air of extreme nonchalance, when called upon to scan, "Please, sir, I don't scan."

Some notes by another classmate give a very good background for the figure of Sill as an undergraduate. At the time Sill entered Yale — in the fall of 1857 — he says: —

"It was in many respects an unreal place. Despite President Woolsey's abiding interest and influence in some national questions, and

he was about the only man in the faculty who manifested any, the institution stood apart from both the acting and the thinking world. The teaching it afforded was, with slight exceptions, mere rote teaching.

“Partly because of poverty, the college did not contain a professor of history, much less of American history — that subject was not even touched; a professor of any political or economic science; or a professor of any modern language. Our first lesson in respect for law was the formal presentation to each of us, of ‘The Laws of Yale College,’ and the exaction of a written promise to obey them. They dated from an earlier generation, had not been brought up to date, any more than anything else in the institution had, and contained some laws that nobody thought of enforcing — among them, laws against smoking and going sailing. Our respect for them as a whole, and their effect on our young minds regarding laws in general, are obvious.

“As to literature, we had recitations only from an elaborately and dogmatically annotated edition of Demosthenes’ ‘On the Crown,’ in the original; and from Whateley’s *Rhetoric* — a fantastic book which lent itself wonderfully to undergraduate fun-making. The literatures of Greece and Rome were used solely as material for vocabulary and grammatical



'drills.' There was not a man in the faculty who had ever done anything in pure literature; or, so far as I can recall, anybody but Hadley and Dana and Whitney, the last two of whom we scarcely ever saw, who ever did any work in anything else that long survived them. We wrote 'compositions' three or four times, which were read to the class (or rather to each writer's one of its four divisions) and never criticized, and we had a few 'disputes' by groups selected in turn, before the 'division,' which were 'summed up' and commented upon, with considerable literary instinct whenever Hadley presided. The topics set for these exercises were occasionally criticism of some author, but were equally apt to be some question outside of practical life, and often outside of practical consideration — for instance, one, I remember, was: 'Is Language of Divine or Human Origin?' That question is a fair illustration of what was, on the whole, the dominating spirit of the college — theological speculation. The Puritan influence still controlled. The officers, as has been intimated, were nearly all Puritan clergymen, holding, in the midst of the nineteenth century, the views they had inherited from the seventeenth, and avoiding and dreading the stir of thought which was beginning to tear down their whole system. The names of Carlyle, Darwin and Mill were never mentioned

in the classroom, and the only notions given us of the doctrine of evolution, which had begun to take form, were in a lecture on Laplace's law of planetary evolution, and in a few then celebrated lectures by Dana, read to us, in his disability, by another. In them he tried to demonstrate that the evolution of the earth, and the life upon it, was in accord with the account given in Genesis.

"Most of the men who regulated the 'thought' of the institution were clergymen. Its trustees practically all were, the 'six senior senators' of the State being mere figureheads, and the representation of the alumni not yet having been instituted.

"On one side, the atmosphere of the place was all 'discipline.' We were taught to overcome obstacles by obstacles being deliberately massed before us, as if learning in its most attractive forms did not present more than enough. In addition to the bare chronology of classic history, we were asked to commit to memory a murderous pamphlet of chemical formulas. The test of merit, rewarded with the honors, was the capacity to recite well. A rote repetition of the contents of the textbook answered the purpose as well as intelligent appreciation. Originality in any form was not stimulated, though one 'composition' (never criticized) did count as much as several reci-

tations. When President Woolsey offered to cushion the bare seats in the chapel at his own expense, the proposition was turned down as tending to make the students effeminate.

“To this hated chapel, we were driven twice a day and four times on Sunday, one of the daily herdings being before daylight in winter. Some compensation for these monastic rigors lies in the fact that during one of them, Sill got the idea for ‘Morning,’ and it symbolized his feeling regarding the lights our teachers read by.

“In short, everything was done to make learning and religion loathsome, and done with considerable success. Yet, as a body, the college officers were men of admirable sincerity and purity of life. But with, so far as I know, one exception, as to capacity to see beyond their narrow range of dogma, they may as well have been monks of the Thebaid, or priests of a lamasery in Thibet. That exceptional man — perhaps the most eminent scholar America has produced — we were hardly brought in contact with; and I did not suspect his largeness of view until we became intimate, years after my graduation. With pathetic self-repression, he stayed at Yale while out of sympathy with his colleagues and the whole intellectual spirit of the place. There may have been others who thought beyond their inherited dogmas, but if

there were, they kept their thoughts to themselves, as he did. Yet all those men gave us a rare example of single-hearted, self-sacrificing, and unswerving devotion to duty, as they saw it. But they had not the gift to see much of it, and so their example lacked inspiration. It is astounding that so much knowledge (one-sided though it was) and so much moral worth could have existed side by side with so much obtuseness. Yet the explanation is not far to seek: a generation earlier, a bright man could have been a Puritan; but in that generation, there had been so much stir of thought that none but a stupid man could grow up a Puritan. Some of the older men were bright, but their ideas were out of date. No younger man could be brought in unless he was a Puritan, and therefore no younger man abreast with the day was among the college officers. The scholarship was a narrow formalism. In the classroom, even Hadley, deep and broad as was his culture, confined himself to Homer's grammar, with little or no reference to his poetry; though, as already intimated, in his comments on some of our scant rhetorical efforts, he showed himself a delicate and suggestive critic.

"Offsetting the atmosphere of 'discipline' was one of mediæval, almost primitive, superstition, mysticism, and dread. The students were affected by it so that their voluntary asso-



ciations, instead of being natural gentlemen's clubs, were 'secret societies,' designated by the usual mystic Greek letters, meeting as far as they could in secret places, with secret rites and strange initiations and mummeries. The chief of them had and still has, as a badge, a gold skull with crossed bones, each member displaying in his room, over the entrance, the real objects themselves. Merely to allude to this society in the presence of one of its members was to insult him and lead him to withdraw from the company. To become one of its fifteen members in senior year was the controlling ambition of the other three years. The halls of these societies were used but one evening a week. At that time Skull and Bones was the only one having its own building. To guard its secrecy, it was made, as many halls have since been for other societies, without windows. Even a generation later, one of the societies has reared a superb (though rather poorly proportioned) white marble Greek temple, lit by the sun only through a skylight over its second story. The idea of a rational clubhouse to be enjoyed at all times, as the society buildings are at other institutions, was, and generally still is, too rational to fit the prevalent atmosphere. Health, of course, was not taken into consideration.

"Athletics in the present sense had not been



evolved. Each class had three or four boat-clubs, crews from which used to go rowing in gigs on Wednesday and Saturday afternoons, and occasionally at other times, and frequently took out guests — not seldom ladies, in the stern seats. The Wednesday and Saturday rows were curtailed by the necessity of getting back to ‘prayers.’ Sill joined one of these clubs in Freshman year, and pulled a fairly good oar. The club came to grief, owing to a certain uncongeniality between the faculty’s system of things and the tastes and convictions of some of the club’s members, including the captain, which led to the temporary separation of these members from the institution.

“This uncongeniality between students and faculty was general and chronic. As there was no congeniality, far less was there any intimacy. The faculty generally consisted (with the exception of the instructor of elocution, of whom we saw little) of men who had never been young. The idea of teacher and student spending an hour together, outside of the effort on one side to detect ignorance, and, on the other, to conceal it, was seldom thought of before dear Timothy Dwight got back from Europe, after Sill’s graduation; the idea of playing a game together would have been ludicrous; the idea of having a smoke together would have been insulting to the older men; and the idea

of taking a drink together, criminal. Once when I was 'called up' for some of my many peccadilloes, after I claimed that I was not given to strong drink, the argument against me was clinched with: 'But you admit that you play billiards and drink wine.' The relation between students and faculty, on the part of the boyish boys and most of the thinking boys, was at best one of sullen indifference, and at worst one of strategic hostility. A student absent from one of the sixteen religious exercises a week, or one of the sixteen literary ones, or unprepared for one of the latter, was permitted to hand in a written excuse. The attitude of strategic hostility made, to the student mind, everything fair in war, and these excuses were very often lies. 'Indisposition' was the euphemism at the base of most of them, and it generally meant indisposition to attend or to study. I doubt if Sill handed in any of these false excuses, and I am confident that Shearer [Sill's closest friend, of whom more later,] did not, but neither of them lacked respect for anybody else because he did.

"In telling all this, I feel a little as if I were sinning with the sons of Noah; but it must be told to explain Sill — to explain the gropings and vacillations and struggles that his early letters are full of.

“Into the atmosphere I have tried to describe, our poet was thrust when he was a boy of less than seventeen. The class, of course, contained a group of youths who, like their teachers, had never been superfluously young, took things as they were given them, and did their best with them — ‘not theirs to ask the reason why.’ Sill did not see much of this conservative element in the class until he met some of them in Skull and Bones in senior year. There was, equally of course, another group full of young blood, much of it foolish blood, some of whom did ‘ask the reason why,’ and found precious little reason. Nearly all of them played much, only one or two of them studied much, two or three of them questioned much, several of them read much — some in books that the faculty would not have recommended, and all of them were in a state of more or less intellectual revolt. Some of them believed as long as they lived, and some of them believe to this day, that their revolt was well justified. To this group Sill naturally gravitated. He was perhaps the leader in the spirit of revolt. He was far-seeing. His *alter ego*, Shearer, was in the same group; but he was wide-seeing as well as far-seeing, and while he shared the spirit of revolt, he was, both by disposition and comprehension, made to temper it.

“Sill and Shearer were both poor, and

'pleasure' costs money. They were also proud and scrupulous: so, even if their disposition had been toward excess, it would not have been as easy to them as to some of their friends. Still did most of the foolish things that were not dishonest which the other boys did, but his native delicacy made the restraint of his poverty superfluous in keeping him from any gross excess. While his principles were more those of Socrates than of St. Francis, his practice was nearer that of St. Francis than of Socrates. However pagan he may have been, it is inconceivable that he would have deliberately pursued his own pleasure to the detriment of another. He would take his share of the flowing bowl, unless his full share would have been too much, in which case there were always others ready to take the excess for him; but he was not intolerant of these friends, if otherwise they merited his regard — not half as intolerant as he was, at first, of intellectual inferiority. This absolutely prevented him, at first, from recognizing the merits of some of the most lovable fellows and finest characters in the class. But he outgrew it, and became a man of very wide sympathies and charitable judgments.

"Not having grown up in the world where one amuses one's self; going to Puritan Yale where that world was unknown and abhorred, instead of to Harvard where it was known and



appreciated; realizing its Philistine side, and having no opportunity to enjoy its æsthetic side, Sill hated it and every symbol of it. 'Society' he would have nothing of. When his beauty and eloquence made all the girls, after they heard him deliver the class poem, wild to have him introduced, he stubbornly refused, even his dearest who wanted to introduce him to their dearest. Yet we know that, outside of 'social occasions,' no man was more attracted by women.

"Some of the lines from the class poem, not printed in the later selections, illustrate his attitude toward the world at this time: —

"The world! The world!  
Mockery, knavery, cheat!  
Down at thy angry feet  
Let the lying thing be hurled.

"None of his portraits do him justice. They all strangely fail to give his face the character — or enough of the character — which would have led any observer to say: 'There is a poet.' He had the most wonderful gray eyes I ever saw; his wavy chestnut hair was just what it should have been; he wore no beard until he was thirty or forty, and was better without it. I believe he always wore a mustache, having, if I remember rightly, an enviable amount of it when we were freshmen. His figure was moderately tall, and slight — too slight, but very



graceful. We used to make fun of his lank shanks. But one day when I, who was taller and much heavier, put on the boxing gloves with him, I realized to my cost that strength was not an affair of muscle alone. By sheer nerve, he could do things that men with much more muscle could not. I suppose he had to pay for it in subsequent fatigue.

"Despite his slight figure, he had a beautiful rich bass voice; and he had, of course, as lyric poets must, a genius for music. He could play on any instrument he took a notion to, with very little practice. Yet I don't remember that he sang in the choir. Perhaps he would have been apt to refrain in those rebellious years, because of distaste for the service.

"Though he was so frail-looking, I don't remember that he ever lacked health, though I find some anxieties expressed in some of Shearer's letters after graduation; but they were mainly, perhaps entirely, lest nervous taxes and uncongenialities should be too much for him. There was no need of his dying young, as we too sadly know.

"Carlyle was probably the great teacher of most of us. It was too early for Mill and Spencer. Sill's chief influence was Tennyson. We all read Emerson and Macaulay. Browning we do not seem to have got to: we knew his wife better: she was nearer our then level. There is

little indication of our then having much to do with Shakespeare. Sill does not even include him among the poets in the letter of a year before his death, quoted in the memoir prefacing the edition of 1902; but in his letter to me of December 24, 1868, from California, he says: 'There's one compensation in living in a heathen country — i.e., that one's only companions are Shakespeare and Shelley and Mill and Browning and Spencer and the others.' Like our college teachers, we as boys lived most in speculations and dreams.

"Nearly all the prizes offered by the faculty or the students for any feats but those of memory and linguistic or mathematical skill, were divided about equally between Sill and Shearer. Of course they were elected on the 'Lit. Board,' and their contributions were awaited more eagerly, probably, than other contributions ever were, by the whole college world: for the recognition of them was not confined to their own class. And of course they were elected (unanimously, I believe) Class Poet and Class Orator, though their 'scholarship' under the rote tests applied by the faculty, did not entitle them to an appearance on either of the stupid occasions (Junior Exhibition and Commencement) which the faculty provided to display the stupid results of their system.

"Sill's independence, and the environment

in which he grew up, were both well illustrated in the great religious revival of '58. This, of course, set in as soon as spring began to stir people's emotions after the great commercial panic in the fall of '57. But instead of being restricted, as such phenomena have been since, mainly to those whose psychic stock-in-trade was merely emotional, it was taken up by people of culture (for those days), and by none more ardently than the faculty of Yale. The whole college was swept off its feet. In our class, Sill, Shearer, and one other were, I believe, the only men who did not join the church. I have an impression that they were about the only ones in the academic department. The reaction was frightful. There probably never was at Yale such an orgy of dissipation as during the following autumn — certainly there was nothing like it in my time. This, of course, doubled the skepticism of those who were out of sympathy with the prevailing ideas, and left them in a more chaotic state than ever. Spencer had not yet put within general reach his point of crystallization for faith and hope, and thinking young men were in the dark and anxious atmosphere that pervaded Sill's and Shearer's early letters, and Sill's early poems."

From the pen of still another classmate. Ralph O. Williams, I take a sketch of Sill at

Yale, interesting not only because it is done by a contemporary, but also because it reveals the unusual and deep regard which Sill inspired in those who knew him, whether early or late in his life: —

“There is lying near me a photographic portrait of Edward Rowland Sill taken in his senior year at Yale College when he was not quite twenty years old. It is on glass, — an old-fashioned ‘ambrotype.’ I have seen perhaps half a dozen later photographs of Sill, taken at various periods of his life, but all the others made him less than he was. The picture before me reveals his extraordinary eyes, — large, oval, deep eyes, whose light seemed to come from the recesses of a reflective mind, — a penetrating light which disclosed the thoughts of those whom it rested on. People who had never seen or heard of Sill, looking at this picture, have exclaimed, “What wonderful eyes!”<sup>1</sup> In other respects, too, the picture is faithful. Sill was hardly more than a boy then, but much more than a boy in mind and character. His face — of regular, handsome features — seemed to be the face of one who had never had a mean impulse. It showed independence of judgment, but not aggressiveness. Notwithstanding its mobility of expression, it was a

<sup>1</sup> Some of the paper photographs of Sill give his eyes a staring look, — a fault probably introduced in retouching the negatives.



calm face, quite unconscious of itself, thoughtful, spiritual, considerate of others. As to the rest of his personality at that time, he was fully grown in height, straight, slim, not muscular, and in seeming good health, — though his health, without being decidedly bad, was not good. His dress was careless, but never slovenly.

“Sill’s course in college could hardly have been different; at least, that must seem so to those who consider his temperament. By disposition he was eager of instruction and learning; he liked to think things out; but he was revolted by lessons that were to be recited parrot-like for a daily mark. Naturally he took as little of the lessening as possible. But I never heard Sill speak unkindly of the wise men of down east who were doing it. He thought they were not in the best way; perhaps some of them, or some of their successors, would find a better way later.

“In such opportunities as there were for exercising his literary power Sill shone from the beginning to the end of the college course. His poem ‘The Open Polar Sea’ was printed in the ‘Yale Literary Magazine’ for April, 1858, while he was in his freshman year. It was published as ‘From the German of Malvaro,’ because the young freshman feared that the senior editors of the magazine would have a poor opinion of a



freshman's output. The poem now entitled 'Morning,' and beginning: —

“‘I entered once, at break of day,  
A chapel lichen-stained and gray,’ —

appeared in the 'Yale Lit.' for June, 1860. At that time Sill was near the close of his junior year and was one of the editors of the magazine. It happened that I saw a proof of the poem at the printer's just as the 'Lit.' was going to press. It differed verbally somewhat from the one printed many years later among his collected poems, and had as a concluding line, rhyming with the two immediately preceding lines, 'Was there not meaning in my dreams.' On my own responsibility (for there was not a moment's time for consulting the poet), I struck out that last line, because, as I told Sill afterwards, 'a fingerpost was n't needed.' Instead of being vexed, he was grateful. The poem is a good example of how a trivial incident which to the barren imagination has no significance can be made to glow by a poet's touch. The 'chapel' was the old college chapel, but not the one that is used for religious services now. The time was earlier than the composition. It was of the days when we had to attend prayers at half past five on summer mornings and at half-past six winter mornings. There was no 'rich stained glass' in the chapel, nor an aisle in the architectural sense. There

were 'ghostly shadows,' and 'the congregation dozed,' no doubt, excepting those who with bowed heads were conning the lesson for the succeeding recitation. The shutter was shifted by a gust of wind, not by one 'who rose with a wistful face.' A dismal scene, and lowering in its influences; but with what charming color the boy artist overlaid the unwholesome fact.

"In writing for college prizes, — although he was always successful, — Sill put under constraint his best impulses; for he never had any desire to shine at the expense of others, and, besides, he looked on such contests as boyish. But he wanted to measure himself with others so as to get a scale of judgment, boy with boys, man with men later. Prizes for literary composition brought him no elation, only a useful stiffening of self-confidence. And that he needed. But although he had such feelings, I am sure, about college honors, Sill then and always hungered for real distinction. Commonplace successes that tickle the vanity and fill the wants of most men had for him no attractions."

Sill's life at Yale fell at a time when the intellectual ferment of the past forty years was being prepared. Though the academic community at Yale was for the most part immune, some of the yeast of question and revolt was

stirring in his mind and in the minds of his friends. The first edition of Darwin's "Origin of Species" came out during his freshman year; Huxley had not come yet, but Carlyle and Tennyson were sowing inquiry broadcast. The unconventionality and austere discontent of Carlyle appealed strongly to Sill. With his eyes already opened to the inequalities of life, the Scot's grim challenge of accepted conditions awoke in him an eager emulation. All his writing in college echoes of Carlyle. "Poor petrifications of men!" he writes in the first essay he contributed to the "Yale Literary Magazine." "... One shudders even to imagine you, at the last, when the great veil is being lifted, with your weazened, world-crustured soul, cringing into the dim outskirts of the presence of the Eternal."

But however much the phrase echoed Carlyle, the thought was Sill's own. So in the essay "Beardless," which also appeared in the "Yale Lit." at this time, there is an appeal for companionship and comprehension of younger men by their elders which influenced his own life consistently and was one of the secrets of his success as a teacher.

"For it is certain that *I* at fifty will look back at *me* of to-day, quite contemptuously and pityingly; wondering how, knowing so little, we 'get along' at all. O foolish future self! thou



EDWARD R. SILL, 1861





has forgotten how much nobler-hearted, holier-souled thou was then than now. Thou art larger limbed now, stronger brained, yet thy boyhood had clearer eyes and purer faith, and was altogether, inwardly and outwardly, more as God meant man to be. Marred and soul-shrunk by the meanness and littleness of a man's daily life in the world, no wonder thou hast forgotten the vision of the morning, the dream of a life that should, for once, be crowned with completeness and with noble meaning. We can but pity one another after all, thou conquered by the world, I with the world before me, unconquerable, and yet that must be met."

His other undergraduate essays — "Failure," a rather scathing analysis of current views of success, and "Vinum Daimonum," a defence of poetry, are in the customary vein of the young idealist. It goes without saying his poems were even more uncompromising in their morality and sombre in their tone. There is something perennially youthful in the solemnity of the lines called "Midnight," and something familiar in the note of sophomoric wisdom and world-weariness: —

"Under the stars, across whose patient eyes  
The wind is brushing flecks of filmy cloud,  
I wait for kindly night to hush and calm  
The wrangling throng of cares and discontents,  
The tangled troubles of a feverish brain.

"I hear the rushing of the wings of Time  
Sweep by me. Voices of the murmuring Past  
Chant a low dirge above my kneeling heart."

The university years over, Sill found himself in his twenty-first year undecided about his future, and quite undetermined about himself. His four years at New Haven had brought him friendships which he kept till he died, and a discovery of talents and possibilities in himself which he had not the slightest notion how to turn to account. His college mates and teachers thought him a poet — almost a genius, with a brilliant future: he knew himself for a youth — let us admit of some promise, but of slender resources and no clear course before him. He had plunged into his *Sturm und Drang* period, but had not yet emerged from it: he had reached the stage of revolt, but had not arrived at a fixed purpose; he had not found the cause or the career to which he could dedicate himself. Sprung from the stock of the Sills and the Rowlands, he could hardly help being an abolitionist, but abolitionism, which had fired many of the more sensitive souls at Harvard, had not blazed up at Yale. There was no such outbreak of patriotism in New Haven as at Cambridge. In Sill's "Commencement Poem," with all its spiritual ardor and aspiration, the only allusion to the war is merely scornful: — "What is the grandeur of serving a state,

whose tail is stinging its head to death like a scorpion!"

Years were to pass before he found his place and work in the world, and the long period of wavering and uncertainty is chargeable not only to the man but to the environment. We have already glanced at the opposing strains, of minister and doctor, in his inheritance; we have noted the broken and scattered instruction of his boyhood, clouded by loss of brother, mother, and father; we have seen the singularly unsatisfactory atmosphere into which he entered at the university. We can hardly be surprised that he should pass out of the academic halls full of opposing ardors and dissonant impulses and aimless purposes.

### III

#### THE VOYAGE 'ROUND THE HORN

SILL spent part of the summer and autumn following his graduation in the beautiful old town of Windsor, Connecticut, where he was born. A scrap from a letter to a classmate indicates that he read poetry if he did not write any, and that his undergraduate love for Tennyson still held.

"Have been noticing what different poets have said about the autumn leaves, as an example of Tennyson's infinite height above them all. You know how he talks: —

"'Flying gold of autumn woodland —'

"'This maple burn itself away —'

"'I laid a fiery finger on the leaves —' etc., etc.

"Other poets, 'brown and sere' — 'sere and yellow' — et cetera, no bettera.

"Been reading (and enjoying — tell it not in Gath) one John Milton's 'Paradise Lost'! I guess the judgment of generations is a pretty sure thing after all.

"Great world as ever, is n't it? How about immortality? Much taught, or at all, in Old Testament? Am still wondering about that

book. Look at *Job* now — it is amazing — one or two thousand years before our era."

In December he and his intimate friend Shearer set sail for California, 'round the Horn, a four months' voyage during which Sill kept a journal as most young men of literary tendencies have done on their first voyages. Some extracts may be saved from oblivion to indicate his half-formed tastes and his powers of observation, but they are best prefaced by a letter written toward the end of the voyage to a classmate in New England: —

PACIFIC OCEAN, March 13, 1862.

It is strange how quickly and completely all idea of *danger* evaporated. After the first fortnight, I never felt the slightest fear of shipwreck or anything of that sort, any more than I should at home of the roof's falling in. Sometimes there is a fearfulness — sometimes an awfulness — about the sea — in the night, with the darkness, and the roar of the wind, and the black waves flashing out white fangs from their deep jaws, and the swift motion (seeming with the noise of the foam seething by, to fairly *hiss* through the water), and the ghostly sails towering up, the mast-tips sweeping great arcs across the flying rags of cloud, their motion and great disproportionate size and height compared with the ship's narrow deck giving one



such an impression of vast instability, and the utter desolateness of the position — cut off from all aid of man among the gigantic energies of blind force — but it does n't inspire what can be called *fear* — such as you have towards a pistol or a falling brick — but a supernatural sort of awe — half cowing, and half rousing the tragic element in a man to a superhuman defiance. . . .

I enjoyed life — lazy and purposeless as the life was. The only thing to mar the enjoyment of it was a restless idea that my *mind* was losing time. I thought with an envious feeling of you who have been using your brains ever since we graduated. A man can't keep in mind, somehow, that he has an eternity before him and need n't ever begrudge any *time* which is spent in the way of his *duty*.

In your last letter you said you hoped I would write something, on this voyage. Well, so did I — but I have n't. I *could* have, of course, by going at it as a *task* — but I think a person ought never to write poetry unless he *wants to* — unless he feels *impelled to tell* something he has in him. If beautiful scenes should inspire thought or rouse deep feeling, I ought surely to have experienced it. Such starlight nights I never saw before — “larger constellations burning” — in the course of one night I saw *all* the stars of first magnitude (twenty in

all) except one, and sparkling through such a clear blue atmosphere as one does n't often see North. The dawn, too, is beautiful. Several times I have got up before it commenced, and, climbing to the highest yard on the mast, have sat there and watched the daybreak. With the short twilight of the latitude the west was all night-sky and the stars bright, while the east was morning, making delicious contrasts of colors.

The strangest life it is — floating on over the desert, so utterly cut off from men and all men's doings. *We* don't care what the world does with itself. The war never enters our heads, except as a recollection of a thing we were interested in, in the *past*. The accident of being on the same *planet* with the rest of mankind is nothing — any more than revolving in the same solar system gives you a lively interest in the social problems of Mars.

The jottings from the journal are accompanied by occasional footnotes of ironical comment eminently just and calculated to disarm the not too critical biographer. They were also accompanied in the original by marginal sketches in caricature of Sill, Shearer, mermaids, fishes, albatrosses, *et al.*, which unfortunately are not now available.

TUESDAY EVENING, 24th Dec., 1861.

Here, it is nine o'clock, almost a dead calm; the sea smooth and oily, seeming to be breathing in its sleep in long, slow swells which roll the ship lazily from stem to stern, and now and then from side to side. The sky overcast and preparing for rain with no promise of a breeze.<sup>1</sup> We are prematurely in the *Doldrums* which have no business to cage us for several degrees yet. There was a marvelous sunset to-night, I can't describe it, words perhaps exist which would set it forth, but it is far out of my skill. The most beautiful west I ever saw. I climbed up the rigging and sat there until the glory had all gone. How sadly the change comes, from all the gorgeous gold and green and violet, the pure olive and lustrous silver, slowly, imperceptibly, into darkening green and then mere dusky masses of cloud and night. There it was so few moments ago, all light and joy and praises, now, while I sit in the same posture, not a limb changed, it is hopeless, loveless dark — "the set gray life, and apathetic end."

SAT. MORNING, Jan. 11.

Lat. 13.44 S. Long. 38.35.

Yesterday afternoon I spent with my microscope examining all manner of queerinesses,

<sup>1</sup> It is a noticeable fact that our young man seems to dwell on the weather as persistently as a bashful girl at a party. As if it could be interesting to people months afterwards and hundreds

fished up in the bug-net — all sorts and varieties of “things forked and horned and soft,” beautiful, curious, comical. Verily man inhabits not only two worlds — of matter and spirit — but three distinct material ones — that revealed by the telescope, that by the eyes, and that by the microscope, the last not least wonderful in its complexity of infinitesimal organs and brilliancy of color. Last night was a beautiful one <sup>1</sup> (how one needs to use that word here at sea). The moon nearly full, near the zenith, the air in which it swam of a pure liquid blue — dark and lustrous. Venus lower down, a drop of molten silver, and great bands and terraces of cirrus cloud slowly moving across the constellations, five bars of which, nearly overhead, were in the likeness of a great superhuman hand — such as might have belonged to the arm “clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful” — on the third finger of which, as it floated up towards the moon, slipped the belt of Orion like a diamond ring.

MONDAY, January 27.

Lat. 45.27. Long. 59.20.

I wish I could get into my log-book some picture of the beautiful faces the sea wears, of miles away. Such, however, is the amusing egotism of immature travellers.

<sup>1</sup> Our ingenious tourist has the real school-girl knack of *adjectives*. The simple young fellow, we suppose, wants to have *us* see all the sights which pleased *him*, and as our language really



changing from "gay, or grave, or sweet, or stern," as the days bring us different winds and climates. To-day it has one of the quiet, smiling looks — one of the many times when it seems more natural to make the sea *feminine*, to think and speak of it as the white-armed, blue-eyed Naiad, than as regal old hoary-bearded Neptune. It is calm as a lake; oily-smooth in some places, crinkled or lightly rippled in others. Off where the noonday sun is reflected, the surface has a green brilliancy, the color of a half-ripe orange, and all sparkling and crinkling, as molten silver might with a crust of diamonds. Before breakfast I climbed to the to'gallant yard and sat astride of it; it was all beauty wherever eye could rest, or ear listen. We were gliding along imperceptibly unless you saw the bubbles pass astern, two or three knots an hour, the soft cool air right astern, through belts of a few hundred yards' breadth of alternately smooth and roughened water. When we were passing through a smooth one all was perfectly hushed near the ship, and it was pleasant to listen to the murmur of the ripples and little waves washing to and fro in the rougher places farther from us, a low, strange noise like the sough of winds in pine woods. I could shut my eyes up aloft there

is lacking in synonyms, let us be charitable while he strums away on his one little descriptive string.



and imagine myself in the deep woods with the wind far off and near, making that pleasant whispering, minor music, and the water plashing about the rudder like the noise of a brook heard near at hand.

I believe I have never spoken of there being always a plashing and swishing and hissing and dashing and rushing noise about the ship in ordinary weather; varying, of course, from pleasant murmurs to loud and fierce tones. It is never perfectly still except in dead calm. Waves little or big are incessantly breaking, rippling and tumbling, near and far, with that same indefinable, vague intermingling of various tones, which one hears lying within sound of the surf on a sea-beach.

THURSDAY, the 7th Feb.

Lat. 26. Long. 103. 9½ morning.

My day began this morning with the *dawn*, as all days ought to — not the withered and tarnished thing which people generally are willing to accept for it, but the *real* dawn. Got up at eight bells (four o'clock), stuck my head out of the window and found it clear, the faintest possible tinge of light on the southeastern horizon already. Traced out the constellations with map at the binnacle light, then climbed to the royal-yard (highest yard on mast) and settled myself across it with my arms around

the slender mast. Some of the old familiar Northern stars were now visible again, Alpha Lyrae, glittering white as of old, the Eagle and the little Dolphin, Arcturus off over the main-mast, and directly overhead the beautiful Scorpion. Besides, were all the brightest of Southern splendors, the Cross and Centaur sinking in the southwest, and Jupiter, hanging large and white upon the dark west like a liquid pearl. By the time all the stars had been recognized an arch of faint light had risen in the east. Each time I returned to it from the stars it had risen rapidly higher and brighter. Suddenly from behind a low cloud along the horizon appeared the old moon, a mere crescent thread of pearl (for to-morrow it is new moon), more slender than one ever sees it in the long twilight of our latitude. The next time I looked at the east a faintly visible film of soft cirrus, unseen before, was rippled up the clear sky in broad, radiating streaks, wimpled across like thin cream when disturbed. All along the western horizon lay rounded cumuli, some floating up and spread over at the top like white smoke, as from a volcano, risen in a still air, others towering like overhanging icebergs, capped with snow, others, in likeness of great countenances—like Greek tragic-masks—earnest or terrified faces motionless under some spell of horror. In the east the clouds piled along the horizon

seemed pressing forward, standing on tiptoe to peer over each other's shoulders, watching for the expected sun. Already they are tipped and edged with red light, one or two floating alone all luminous from within apparently with scarlet. Off in the southwest rise Andes peaks, their tops roseate over the dark bars of stratus drawn across their sides and bases, while the "icebergs" in the west are become smouldering coals with the red heat glowing through their coating of white ash. Now the cloudy threshold of the east is burning gold — and at last up the sky flame the broadening rays, firing shaft upon shaft of the clouds around, and burning through the low cloud wall in broken rifts, rises the dazzling sun. The stars have been fast melting away into the brightening blue — Alpha Lyræ, only a few minutes before the sun appeared, flickered out, a white, glittering point, then Alpha Centauri was lost, and last of all Jupiter can no longer be found. It was full day, — the water blue and sparkling in the light breeze, — so I climbed to the "truck" (the round ball on top of the mast), "shinning it" from the yard, hung my hat upon it in triumph, slid back to the yard and standing upon it horrified my chum (who had just come on deck down below me) by waving my hat to him, then descended. In the evening and morning of the same night I had seen all the stars of first

magnitude, except one, viz: the Southern Fish — fourteen were visible at one time, in the evening.

SUNDAY, Feb. 23.

Lat. 32. Long. 78.

8½ o'clock, morning. I am almost ready to believe that on the ocean, at least, where man's wickedness has had least influence, Nature keeps Sabbath: air and water and sky are so bright and peaceful. Last night, for the first time in several weeks, we had a cloudless sky, except low down about the horizon. Right astern were the Cross and its companion glories, scattered down the Milky Way, diamonds and rubies in mosaic on a pearl-dusted ground of dark blue. Overhead was glazing Sirius, white-hot, and south of him the next brightest star in the heavens, Canopus. In the west through the spaces of the sails sparkled Orion and the Bull, while the Pleiades were just going down into the cloudy circle of the horizon. Round the edge of the mainsail shone the Lesser Dog, and the Twins. In the east hung the Sickle, and mid-way between it and red Spica Virginis burned Jupiter, preternaturally splendid, sending a track across the water like a moonrise. Just under the Cross a black hole opened through the stars out into the fathomless darkness — the larger "Coal Sack" — nearly circular, six degrees in diameter. The other side



of the South Pole Stars lay the Megellanic Clouds — like bits of hazy cirrus a little larger than Orion's Square.

TUESDAY, Feb. 25.

Lat. 28, S. Long. 101.

I have been struck with the resemblance between our ship and society. We are a perfect little microcosm, one little crystal cut out of the great crystal, perfect in shape and an exact counterpart of the whole from which it was taken. Forward, in the crowded, uncleanly fore-castle, separated from all direct association with the occupants of the cabin, aft, are the common sailors (the laboring masses, ignorant and brawny). Next amidships is the galley with its cook and steward, the *providers* (farmers and merchants). Next, inhabiting the forward end of the house, the three mates, giving the orders of the Captain to the men (the professional men, teaching and seeing to the execution of the principles of the few leading minds, among the masses). Then in the cabin two sorts of passengers — equally unconnected with the working or guidance of the ship from day to day — the rich youngster, travelling to kill time (the gentry in ennui and kid gloves), and the scientific person, microscope or telescope in hand, regardless of the wind so it doesn't cloud his stars (the Galileo, etc., careless of politics and working for the Future). Last



of all, with the Wheel for will and the Compass for conscience, and the Chart for Bible, stands the Captain (the great thinker, here and there standing alone, comprehending and directing the whole mechanism of society).

*Afternoon* — One o'clock.

I have been lounging up in the top this forenoon (a very comfortable, secluded roost). The ocean fairly persecutes me with its clamorous demands to be expressed in words. I become an "Ancient Mariner," whose "Wedding Guest" is my journal, having no peace till I get what is before me expressed. What a difference there is between the writing of a man who is trying to say handsome things, and that of him who is impelled by an instinctive desire to "get it expressed" as I have called it. Yet the latter gets all the discredit of the former with the mass of readers. Maury and Ruskin are pretty good examples. It is perfectly evident (in *Phys. Geog. Sea*) that the flowery Lieutenant is only describing Nature because it ornaments his book; instead of trying to paint accurately things as they are, he is stringing pretty words together. Ruskin, on the contrary, is evidently struggling with the scene before him, to imprison the beauty in words — not *struggling* either, for that conveys an idea of some dubiousness, in the attempt, as to its success — say rather is earnestly and swiftly painting it there

for you, unable in his enthusiasm to pause or rest till it is done, and you see it all as he saw it. For instance, on page 129, Maury says of the Southern sky, "Canopus and Sirius, etc., etc. are high up in their course; they look down with *great splendor, smiling peacefully* as they precede the Southern Cross on its western way." Now I consider it impossible that any sane man should have had those two incongruous impressions upon his mind from the same stars at any one time — consequently he must be *shamming* one of them. Undoubtedly the truth is, he thinks the "smiling" idea (suggested by some rhymer) will sound rather well, and so he says it.<sup>1</sup> I was going to speak, when my critical streak came over me, about the sound of the water as I leaned back in the "top" and listened to it. It seemed compounded of the whispers of pine woods, the washing of small waves against the bow of a rowboat, the hollow murmur of a shell, the babbling of a little hidden brook in the woods, and the wind brushing and bending the trees. With a fresher breeze it is the noise of Big Falls heard from halfway down the hill. Then there is the low fluttering sound which the wind makes against the ear,

<sup>1</sup> Our pretentious young wanderer is really going it rather strong. "That's the bungling way Maury does, you know, now see how nice *I* can do it!" Let us hope, however, that he is not such a humbug as he seems — perhaps the young fellow is really honest in what he says, after all.

always mingled with rest. Nature tries hard to satisfy us with her music — like some Indian woman, bending over the little white captive which the warriors have stolen and brought to her, trying to make it understand her simple lullabies. But it is in vain — the sounds are all musical, yet there is no human meaning in it. We turn away from the wind and the wave, longing for some old song that has linked the voices of a friendly circle, some tune that has borne a meaning to us separate from the mere notes, as the expression of human fellowship and affection. Yet, if it had been safe, I could have gone to sleep very easily there in the top, with my head resting on my arm, lulled by the waves, looking off through half-shut eyes on blue water, flecked with white foam, under blue sky, islanded with fleecy, pearl-colored cloud, and with the song of the Lotus-eaters singing itself in my head. It is the most delightful sailing, this, that I can imagine. Sails all set, “wings” and all, just kept full and motionless all the time, wind hardly perceptible, no rollers, beautiful sky and water, soft, warm air, and going on, night and day, about six miles an hour, with only enough gentle rocking, slowly, now and then, to seem the embodiment of idleness and calm.

## IV

### CALIFORNIA

THE five years that Sill now spent in California were true *Wanderjahre*, for though when the episode closed he was still uncertain of his vocation, the range of choice had narrowed to teaching, or the alternative, preaching. The years were filled with restless activity. For a time he worked in the post-office at Sacramento; some months he spent on a ranch; some months at studying law; for a time he looked about for a school to teach; perhaps the longest interval was given to "clerking" in a bank at Folsom. None of these occupations satisfied his mind or allayed his discontent. The strangeness of the place contributed to his restless feeling: at first he seems to have suffered from something like homesickness, and he evidently disliked California, or thought he did, very cordially. The mood passed and the time came when he could sing her praises as fervently as any native, though one may permit one's self the mental reservation that the praise may have been for the outward California and that the Puritan never became spiritually acclimated.



“Well,” he writes, in March, 1862, “as I said, we got in last week — were disappointed in California’s first appearance. Swore an oath, at the expiration of the first day’s travelling around San Francisco, not to make ‘this people *our* people nor their God our God’ — for their God is money. Yet I have liked it better every day, so far — but could not live here long — no culture, no thought, no art. My town here (as I call it in distinction from S.’s town, San F.) is at present a dismantled wreck, by the floods of the winter — people still go about in boats instead of buggies. It’s a sort of muddy Venice, with little wooden houses instead of the ‘Palace and the Prison on either hand.’”

Six months later he was still “very tired of California and indeed sick at heart of such people and such circumstances as surround me here,” which he refers to again the same month as “out here in heathendom.” Nor had he softened toward the golden West when the year had rolled round. “I refuse to consider myself anything but a pilgrim and a stranger. I don’t like the country any better than when I wrote before, but I presume I shall think it best to stay here till next spring when I shall hope to depart. . . . For to my taste the ups and downs, summer and winter, snow and flowers, rain and then sunshine of the weather East, are much



pleasanter than the monotonous fairness of the skies here."

"To tell the truth," he writes to a classmate in the spring of 1863, "I have had the Devil's own time out here in some respects. I don't have any feeling of having been treated unjustly, or that my fate has been hard at all, for it has n't. I have the common sense, I hope, to perceive that the trouble has been with me, not with circumstances." It is only a youthful growl, after all, and explained in part by a line from another letter, — "Half the weariness of my life here consists of its terrible isolation."

To California's physical charm he could never, of course, be indifferent. It grew upon him. After two years in Sacramento he was writing in this strain: —

"California (so far as that means the natural and not the human aspect thereof) is inexpressibly beautiful just now. The trees are all just 'out,' in their spring vesture — the fields full of flowers — nobody has any right to talk about fields carpeted with flowers till he has seen them here (or, I suppose, in the still more tropical climates). Great gorgeous fellows, you know — like all the conservatories you ever saw broken loose and romping over the wild plains here, exulting and irrepressible. And not only these superb sorts, but come to stoop down

and look closer you find multitudes of the least wee blossoms—little stars, scarcely bigger than a pin's head, blue, and pure white, perfect as gems — only so for a couple of months or three months — then the parching, rainless summer bakes the ground, and browns the dry grass to a monotonous tint that makes one hot and thirsty even to look at it.

“And as with the vegetation, so with the children born here. . . . Little human blossoms, such as one rarely sees in the cold, Atlantic States. Mites of girls, with complexions like porcelain which you look at the light through — and soft, beautiful eyes. And little boys, fair and delicate as girls — bright and gentle, but so fragile-looking that it seems as though to speak suddenly to them would shock them out of existence. They come around to my post-office windows, toddling bits of creatures, asking for letters as sedate and grave as old men — and trotting off with them in their little hands, the letter almost as big as the sprite that carries it. Whereat the clerk, Sill, pokes his head contemptuously through the window, and marvels at the climate which produces such things.”

The California years were *Wanderjahre*, no less of the mind than of the body, and of the spirit perhaps even more than the mind — years of all manner of seeking, questioning,

trying of experiments and searchings of the soul. Every profession and some trades he chose and discarded, only to leave the matter unsettled at the end. His first leadings, curiously and naturally enough, were toward teaching. While he was still on shipboard he wrote his friend Dexter, "If possible I shall collect some children who don't know anything and follow your pedagogal footsteps." And shortly after reaching Sacramento, he wrote, "No place here for schoolteachers. Unless one could teach them how to make money fast. Nobody would send their children." Before the summer was over he was dipping into Blackstone: —

July, 1862.

As for me, I have come to it finally, like all the rest of 'em — I am to study law. And what a lawyer I shall make! I suppose I am one of the first, though, who ever determined on *that* profession for the benefit it would be to himself spiritually. Yet that's my crotchety. We are (some people don't seem to be — but you and I and a few of us certainly are) planted down in the midst of a great snarl and tangle of interrogation points. We want to find — we *must* find — some fixed truth. Either we are wrong and the vast majority of thinkers right, or they are wrong and *we* right — and that,

too, not on one point, but a thousand — points of the vastest scope and importance. As Kingsley puts it, we are set down before that greatest world-problem — “Given self, to find God.” So, considering that for such tasks the mind needs every preparation, skill and practice in drawing close distinctions, subtileness in detecting sophistry, strength and patience to work at a train of thought continuously long enough to follow its consequences *clear out*, and some systematized memory (if for nothing but holding and duly furnishing your own thoughts when needed) — I say, seeing no better — or rather, no *other* — way to gain these but by entering the law, thitherwards I have set my face. . . . I have sifted it all down to this conclusion — that in teaching, or in literature, or even in following up some chosen science (much less some chosen art, as poetry), the mind would not get fitted for that serious work which is before it. In them, it might become cultivated, stored with knowledge, in some sense developed — but not disciplined. Now just take that question alone — Is Christianity true? What impudence it would be in us to consider that settled in the negative, until we felt that our intellects were as strong, as capable of close, protracted reasoning, as little liable to be misled by sophistry, as all those greatest men who have time after time settled it for themselves

in the affirmative. I for my part can see no way in which I can at the same time earn a living, and get the *active powers* of my mind thoroughly disciplined, except by studying law. . . .

The law loosened its hold. In November he writes: —

“September and October I spent for the most part on a ranch, as they call their farms out here. It was a large stock ranch, over west of here some fifty miles in the Coast Range Mountains. . . . There are about 150 horses and 400 or 500 cattle running wild over a tract of some ten miles long and two or three wide — entirely unfenced, the only limit to their grazing being the necessity of going to a little creek for water and the inaccessible steeps and ravines of the surrounding hills.

“My principal employment was taking care of horses and riding horseback after the wild cattle, from dawn to bedtime. It was fatiguing work at first, but I got so that I rode my fifty miles between breakfast and supper without difficulty.”

And before the end of the month, — “I have been trying to teach school out here, but not yet have succeeded in finding a situation.”

By the next summer he had shut the law-books for good: —



SACRAMENTO, CAL., Aug. 6, 1863.

— Vocation. That is still the great vexation with us. What was I born to do? Two little goblins [a jocular allusion to himself and Shearer] running distractedly up and down, wringing their hands, with "What was I made for?"—till big Death comes out on them with a great laughing, "Ho! ho! ho! ho! To die!" and sweeps them out of the way. I'll tell you first about myself. . . . I am not going to study law. I am getting slowly proficient in shorthand, as a trade to rely on, and earning what I can as a post-office clerk. For the present I shall stay in P. O. All I ask is, to be supported, with a little leisure for study. The more, the better. And with a *hope* of laying up such an amount from year to year as shall make the leisure grow longer, and the necessity for labor (mechanical) less imperious, however slowly, as I grow older. My constitution and frame forbid me to suppose that I shall live many years, so I am the less exercised in mind about hopes, plans, or fears, for any distant future. . . .

It is fortunately not necessary to take Sill, *ætat* 22, very seriously on the subject of his health; on that topic he was for a short time rather imaginative. The next phase of the "vocation" problem may nevertheless have

been affected by this attack of interest in his health. In February, 1864, he writes: "I am trying to study medicine (you remember suggesting it to me once) and my only familiar acquaintance made here is a doctor who gives me the use of his books, office, and experience for the few hours which I can save from my day's work. I can lay a few of the foundation stones here to be built upon (next year when I come East) in the lecture and dissecting room."

This phase while it lasted was acute. "Next spring, 1865," he writes again, "I mean to come back with sound health, large pectoral muscles, a little elementary knowledge of medicine, and about \$500 in jolly greenbacks. . . ." But there were other turns of Fortune's wheel. A month later he writes of a change which apparently put an end to the study of medicine.

Mch., '64.

Next month I am going to "move" — shall quit the post-office, and go up to a little town some twenty miles north of Sacramento — Folsom (*Foolsom* — in the barbarous dialect of the natives here — I don't know but the name is a fearful augury of my wisdom in going there). Goes I there into a bank — changing my delightful employment of peddling postage stamps (stomps — they call 'em here) for that

of buying gold dust from Mexicans, Digger Indians, and Chinamen, who are all great at the "surface-mining" in that vicinity.

The year which he now spent at Folsom was attended with somewhat less discomfort and discontent than the preceding period. He had the good fortune to find as chief Mr. C. T. H. Palmer, himself a graduate of Yale and a lover — even a practitioner in a modest fashion — of literature, with whom Sill established a friendship that lasted the rest of his life. Fragmentary notes to classmates give the setting: —

FOLSOM, May 23, 1864.

I am established here. It is a little, insignificant town, but one very pleasant household, in which I am fortunate enough to be. It is one of these little scooped-out holes among the foothills (the prefaces to the Sierras), with fever and ague rampant, and hotter than any hot road in Litchfield County. I am learning to keep bank books, which I hate, and manage an express agency, which I don't like, and to buy gold dust, assay dust for gold, which is n't quite so bad, and to be decently genial and human, which is excellent for me.

FOLSOM, CAL., June 15, 1864.

The beauty of my position now is that I am among a very few very fine people, i.e., about

three or four. We constituting an oasis in the usual horrid description of desert made up of "Pike's, fools, fools, fools, and other fools." Business, as you know, I do not mightily enjoy. And here I am, confined to the office from 6½ mornings to ditto ditto at night. The evening only, being hallowed and glorified by a piano, a good little library, and the conversation of people who *et illi* in Arcadia — i.e., have been to Yale (the *caput familias* at least has) or caught its spirit hereditarily. My chief, C. T. H. Palmer, supported himself through Yale (Class '47) (at least the spreeing part of his support, *quod maximum*) by writing for Mags, etc., and to this day is a Poick. His wife is a granddaughter of Prex. Day's and her brother is a worthy scion of the stock.

My little town here is an oven, cheerfully planted with "shakes" and other bilious fevers. The Chinese portion of the population form its most industrious and respectable class, and employ themselves in mining and looking generally absurd and Mongolian in their persistent Chinese rig (which I adopt so far as shoes are concerned to scuff around in, indoors). The American element loafs around whiskey shops, burns its vitals out with hellish brandy, until fever and shakes settle them quietly into the graveyard. Of course there are a few respectable, good, vulgar people, who keep up a Sun-



day School, make a sparse gathering of audience around the empty church Sundays, and try to build up a new New England out here, as eventually will be succeeded in, all over California.

There is one thing of my 'circumstances here which you will rejoice *mecum* at — I am no longer wholly divorced from music. I play the little hewgag in the church and get bites and sips at other music from the piano. I suppose you have never known so complete a starvation from music as I have endured the last two years until now. Next to losing all *love*, it seems to me the greatest privation man is capable of suffering.

The change of place and of occupation gave a new direction to Sill's thoughts. The year 1864 was a time of emotional and spiritual unrest more acute than he had known before.

"My dear friend," he writes to a classmate, in March of that year, ". . . your letter pulled upon my very inwards, and I want to sort of explain to you why I do not answer it by packing my trunk with my three least ragged shirts and my Tennyson, and getting into a mailbag myself and coming on. I do really believe I catch myself heartily wishing I was installed in that asst. librarianship, and chumming *tecum* in fair old New Haven. Yet to go on there immediately



would be in some sense a cowardly backing out. It would be facing the world and then running away; in taking up arms against a sea of trouble, and having them beautifully broken over my head. If I were a scholar, if I had been a faithful student in college instead of a hair-brained ass, I should desire no greater fortune than to be, as you are (I rejoice to learn — *gratulator tibi* — consider yourself gripped), connected with Yale. It has been mainly my sense of incapacity that has prevented my continuing in my first plan of teaching — which I intended to have followed till it led me to some such path.

“As it is, I have taken to clerkships, and shall depend on such husks, to support me till I can learn (if ever) to be in some higher capacity useful. Yet I do not now intend to stay *here* longer than one more year. It is as you say a gross, deadening place. I abominate it, from first to last. Next spring, 1865, Sex [Shearer] and I mean to come home. What to do there I can form no guess. Not to starve I am sure, and not become pedlars I hope. You say you ‘don’t know how high my ambition is’ — in my present circumstances and mood, and beliefs, it sounded like a sort of sarcasm. If ‘Brutus says’ I ‘was ambitious,’ I suppose I must admit it. I believe I thought more highly of myself than I ought to think, in college, even in those

last, self-questioning days. But I believe I have got out from under that egotistical nightmare, never, I hope, to be ridden with it again. I only ask of the Fates now, to give me knowledge and to make me be, in some way, really useful. . . .”

And in June: “No time to write now — I’m standing at my desk, with the appurtenances of business hanging around me, like the shackles on a demd slave, the pen only caught from behind its accustomed nook, the ear, for a mere parenthesis of talk with you. I think if I could get away from counters and desks, into the woods somewhere, after my last three years’ experience, I would be glad to do it — I wonder if somewhere in Maine there is not a cabin, deserted of its last hermit, under some big trees, with a cliff hanging over it, and a stream to catch one’s daily meat out of — if so, it was built for me.”

In August he was still strenuous — and still groping — but turning now toward theology; for matters of faith had laid hold of him — matters which were to engage his attention for the next three years: —

“I am working very hard just now — at what (I never can shake off the feeling — the conviction) is unprofitable labor — mere business.

“How much weariness, etc., one can stand,

though, when it is known to be for a limited time. . . . Have n't you often been newly startled at the sudden realization of how much man owes to Hope?

"My great comfort is that man can't take his learning or his culture out of this life with him — Death pushes back everything from the gate except the naked soul. — Hence it don't much matter that one can't study, and know this or that.

"... I've been reading theology lately. — You spoke of the legion of things which claim our attention — verily, verily. But moral philosophy stands first — then metaphysics — then down, to medicine, literature, sociology, *kakology*, history, etc. — I keep a little fountain babbling and plashing in my brain, by reading, nearly every day, a word of Tennyson or Browning (Mrs. I mean) or Ruskin or Bible or somebody — I would like to take your arm and start on a trip through moral philosophy, by evenings. . . .

"I want to learn the organ when I come East. What will it cost me, besides time? It is in me if I do not get too old before it can come out."

It was during his residence at Folsom in '64 and '65 that the love affair which caused some of his friends anxiety waxed and waned. There is no doubt that Sill was sincere and that he be-

lieved himself to be seriously in love, but it may be doubted whether it was not a "false dawn," lighted by sympathy and intensified by his loneliness. The first allusion to his state of mind occurs in a letter to a classmate in New Haven: —

"My boy, have you, of late, had much thought about the domestic question (*domus*, a home)? — I know you have, more or less, pondered it. Have you in your flittings happened upon any touches or hints of it, so as to bring it up vividly, as a matter of contrast? — That have I — and the chief end of man seems to lie in there somewhere. The question is, shall a man balk — shall he refuse to be coddled, and pull back, and snap at the good angels, and say he won't have anything except bare life unless they'll explain it all to us, in which we have the sour satisfaction of not being fooled and amused. Or shall he enter the game cheerfully — content, if it's blindman's buff, to be blindfold — take his share of the burdens and blessings — have wife and love — praise God gratefully for sunshine and trustfully for storms — and die with 'thy will be done!' . . . Do you read Spencer and Renan? — I sort o' shrink from these loud fellows, who claim to tell it all. Yet I presume it's our duty to hear what they say. Have n't yet. I feel a preference in me to look over what little general his-

tory I have (in mind) and blink a little at the old stars and think it over for myself — don't you?

"Sometimes, after some peculiar blessing from the good thought angels, after some solitary walk at night, I seem to get calmer and better views, and to feel these fellows to be all flippant and inadequate. . . ."

To one person only did Sill write at any length of the love passage, and these letters contain the entire conjugation, *amo, amabo, amavi*.

FOLSOM, CAL., March 20, 1865.

To-morrow comes a steamer mail and I hope a letter from you. But to-morrow also goes a steamer mail and I want to get a letter off, so I can't wait. I've got a thing to ask advice about, so to business fustly. Here is a girl twenty years old, with good brains, and unconquerable will, who is bent on finishing (that is, *getting*, to our classic understanding) her education. She is teaching school and saving up her little earnings to go to Normal School at San Francisco after her present term's engagement is out. Of course you don't need to be told that any school in San Fran — is a humbug — a bilk — She has got to go East, now, where shall she go? I'm slightly inclined to Mount Holyoke. Knowest aught of that institution?



And what is it about some big female college or other which Dr. Cox has somewhere in New York State? I thought of Holyoke because I know it is not costly, and the girl has only a little — six or seven hundred dollars, perhaps — to devote to it. Give to me your opinion as to where that little could be most advantageously spent by a girl who does n't want French or piano or painting or elegancies, so much as solid "male" education — such as we wanted, and want. Ask anybody you know who is "up" on these matters, and please send me immediately your opinion. Having said thus much, from a business point of view, it will perhaps be unnecessary to add that I love said girl and that she loves me, — which renders my little question a very important one to me, — where shall my little girl go to make herself what she wants to be before she will hear of marriage. Now, don't tell me anything about expensive places, for we won't hear a word of it. There is and can be and shall be (for the present) only so much in the purse — where will it buy the *most* of what we want?

Now, dear H——, I have n't time to tell you about my having fallen in love — you'll be very glad to hear of it I know — and you may not be displeased to learn that you're the only friend east of California who has been told it. I would n't say anything to anybody, 'cause

I don't want to have 'em write me nonsense about it. And please say naught to any one of what I have asked you about, and why. Some of these days I'll sit down and relate my little story, for your and F.'s amusement.

I don't know what I am going to do. Sex and I are hobnobbing over the question of ways and means, but *what* it weighs, and *what* it means, we don't know yet. No time now. Hope I'll hear from you to-morrow. Answer this as soon as you can.

Yours ever

ED. R. SILL.

I have n't written to any one but you about my conjugation of *amo* — *amat*, and shan't at present.

Love to the Beloved — ask her if I shall send my dove to her for a friend if she goes East?

FOLSOM, CAL., June 13, 1865.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND — . . . In the first place my little girl will very likely never be my wife, — for a number of complicated reasons which I can't tell in a letter. Even if we were certain of marrying sometime, we could not do so for two years at least. We have no money and no sufficient health. And a person of weak physique cannot marry without money, as you can easily see. Wherefore the

plan which you so eloquently urge of being myself the teacher, and the fellow pupil at the same time, is impossible for us. You have given me a number of new ideas about this troublesome subject, and a great deal to think about. I believe you are right in the main, only it is obvious that the plan, in its minutiae, is only applicable to persons, either of strong constitutions or some means of support besides daily and wearying work. I was disappointed at your low estimates of the large schools there, but I still think they must be better than the schools in this country. —'s mother insists upon her staying in California; I insist that she had better go to New England. How the matter will end I cannot foresee. I am in great trouble and perplexity about her affairs and my own. I think in the course of the fall shall be with the Shears on a ship aiming around the Horn.

I expect you to keep my confidence in your own (and your wife's, of course,) heart. I tell no one else on that side of the ocean. I am blue and bothered by various perplexing things, and can't write more than this note, for this steamer.

. . . . I really think that Shears and I shall be on the ocean by September, and perhaps before. I am *tired* — I want the long rest of the sea.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., Aug. 6, 1865.

I have been running from sickness for the last month and a half. The malaria caught me, at Folsom, and hit hard. Came down here and the sea breezes have put life into me again. This week (this is the first day of it) I shall go back to my work. I don't think I am fond of work, H——, are you? Oats and dignity is much preferable.

People think that a thinking man's speculations about religion, etc., interfere with his daily life very little, but how certain conclusions do take the spine out of one's existence. These Spencer chaps may be very excellent, but to me there is an Apple of Sodom smack about it all. Little pigmies. What kind of babbling is this for worm-meat to emit? "For man" (not even with a capital M) "is not as God" — and I more than suspect that the said worms lick their chops over the brain, as over the coarser tidbits of the grave.

Upon the mood into which he now entered several earlier letters throw a good deal of light, letters which recall undergraduate disputations but which also reveal the earnest religious disposition which Sill never lost.

"It is strange," he writes to his friend Dexter, "how the weaker and lesser thing has power with us, simply through its nearness,



to overcome the greater and higher — i.e., how troubles of earth conquer the faith and hope of the larger world, as the flimsy clouds by being so near us overcome the stars. I wonder if the great souls of old times did not somehow draw and clasp close to them the unseen realities, so that they gained such victory over present and visible matters. Tennyson says, 'Oh, well for him whose will is strong!' I would substitute 'faith' for 'will.' The will is an iron heel to crush down the casual obstacles of the path, but faith is a clinging hand, reaching far upward and holding by the hand of God. I suppose to all of us who have stepped from college into the actual world, all things have become more earnest in the past year. It would be strange if each of us had not thought more seriously of 'things beyond,' as well as of things here in reference to them. Every one seems to have been suffering some peculiar trouble. You say, and I am very glad for you, that you have gained some clearer views. I do not know that I can say that for myself. I have smitten down some errors and vanities, perhaps; — it required little skill to do that — I had but to walk into my mental underbrush anywhere, and cut and slash right and left. I could pull tares indiscriminately with no danger of uprooting any wheat — for there was but little in the field. I wish I had more faith in *men*, as



well as in God. Out of all the human beings I ever saw, or heard of, if it were not for the very few, scattered here and there one, in history and the present, I should be utterly hopeless of man and his world. I have at times dragged anchor and drifted almost out of sight of my belief in immortality, just from a murky consideration of the question, What is there in man worth perpetuation? Why should a mean little pleasure-seeker like him be crystallized into immortality? Why should not the abused elements scatter and recombine into higher forms? But then I cry, 'Get thee behind me, Satan,' and grope for the guiding hand."

SACRAMENTO, Aug. 6, '63.

I have had some queer things going on in my inner man, since I saw you. I am a hermit here, caring for none, cared for by none. And it has grown upon me to cling to my cave. Personal defects, morbid shrinkings from ridicule, scorn to be scorned by things I scorn, overpowering sense of dissimilarity, mortified pride as to fulfilling expectations, dread of the dependent helplessness of poverty, and a host of things, some little and mean enough, others larger and unspeakable, make me hold back from returning East. . . .

I know that Duty is the one end, — and our acquired knowledge is a ridiculous mote,

at the best, — yet it is the noble hunger of the soul — this after *truth*. And to me Duty seems to say that one particle added to the world's true knowledge, or a single effort put forth to make men see higher things than food and money-getting, is better than all bread-and-meat philanthropies. . . .

SACRAMENTO, Aug. 16, 1863.

. . . I'm great on analogies, you know (defect in my mind, maybe — imagination developed at expense of reason) — Well — I often think what if we should set our children at some occupation or other — told them, for instance, to stir the pudding or the potato in the kettle lest it burn, while we went upstairs for something — and Billy should say to Sammy, “don't let's stir — what's the use — don't see the reason” — and so we should come back and find the dinner burnt up. Oh, how we'd trounce 'em!

That's an absurd way of putting it, and not as it was in my mind, but I'm rattling ahead to-night, not stopping to take care — but I so very often think of us as foolish children who get fretful, and scared, and maybe to crying for Pa to strike a light so that we can *see* him, and so on, when if we only *knew* a little more, it is all right. You see, I take it for certain that these innate human instincts (as, the conviction of

the duty of obeying conscience, the obligatoriness of duty, the duty of seeking true knowledge, and attaining our ideal of character, etc.) as the word of God to us. Intuitions *must be* the commands of God. *Nonne?* They are the voice of the Father, in the night, when we can neither see his face nor touch his hand, but are silly children if we do not obey without getting frightened at the dark. Trusting to what that same Voice tells each of us that it will be morning in a few hours, and light (and not a single man ever lived who has not heard *that* from the Voice). My belief is that these analogies are not merely accidental things — but are meant to teach us. . . .

To his classmate Henry Holt he wrote more fully on this matter than to any one else, and, immature as the letter is, it is also illuminating:—

“You ask for a ‘brief’ summary of my reasons for believing in immortality. You need not have stipulated for the brevity. The reasons *for* are few and short, to me. The reasons *against* are the ones which would take up room in telling. Perhaps the former have *force* enough to overbalance the weak hosts of the latter—I hope so. — I do not think immortality can be made to appear very certain to us. ‘Lord, we beseech thee,’ is about all we can say for our-

selves. Here is my best reason for such hope as the occasional gleam of sunshine lets me have.

“Who forged that other influence  
That heat of inward evidence  
By which he doubts against the sense?”

That and the belief, yea, the implanted certainty which all the devils cannot root out, that God is Perfect —

“Thy power and love — my love and trust,  
Make one place everywhere.”

Cousin thinks he has proved that man *must be* immortal, if God is just. If I was sure of that, it would forever end all doubt with me. I cannot believe that there is any real evil in the universe, because I cannot make such an idea compatible with God's Perfectness. I believe pain and pleasure are both in the end, in some mysterious way, ἄγαθα, πάντα ἄγαθα. If annihilation is a real evil to man, or an injustice from God, that settles it with me as impossible. But — The great reason against immortality, to my mind, is the question, Why *should* man be immortal? What is there in us worth perpetuation? Why should such a thing be kept, and not moulded over as the other temporary existences are? Then again I hear the

“‘little whisper, silver clear,’—  
As from some blissful neighborhood,  
A motion faintly understood,—  
‘I see the end and know the good.’  
‘A hidden hope,’ the voice replied.”

“I cannot accept what you say about Christianity without a ‘but’ or two. Your theory is tempting, I acknowledge, but, H——, there are one or two stern, uncompromising turns of ‘either-or’ logic, which won’t let me accept peace on that basis. Either Christ was God, or He was not. And if He was, we must take what He said as actual truth, not to be twisted or turned aside for you or me, if we were nine times the men we are. Through his name, his sacrifice, and his intercession, and *thus alone*, can we inherit eternal life. I seem to see Him standing there, on the common ground that other men were treading, with the actual everyday sunshine on his meek head, with a solemn, earnest face looking at you and me as we stand with the multitude about Him, and saying with that awful ‘authority,’ ἐξουσίας, which He is said to have always seemed to have, ‘he that believeth shall be saved — he that believeth not shall be damned.’ ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not shall not see life.’ And out of that word ‘believeth’ it is impossible to get any but the plain, straightforward meaning of accepting his claims and assertions as absolute truth. . . . You speak of Tennyson, — I take it that in ‘In Memoriam’ we have the autobiography of his progress *through* disbelief, doubt, to full faith — I don’t mean that he



wrote it as such, but his views show themselves from epoch to epoch of his mind's life. The introduction was written last, and I interpret that as *orthodox Church-of-England belief* in the Christian religion. . . .

"Another thing. I came at Christianity one night thinking about what we are, and what God must be, from another side (don't you know, that often we seem to think around to a certain subject by way of a new train of thought, and suddenly seem to come upon it from an entirely different point of the compass from our usual view of it). I was thinking out into the material universe creeping out from star to star, from system to system, till I got way off where I was *afraid* almost of the awful distance and darkness, and then still there was infinite space stretching on and on, and no nearer to God, yet, — where was my Maker? Not there; the air and ether even of boundless space was not the medium in which He was. Completely as my little human soul shrunk and cowered before the mere material universe, still there was another more awful, more inconceivable — the universe of Spirit, in which (except that 'in,' which denotes a space-relation, means nothing when used of *that* world) God is — and as the overwhelming thought came upon me of the utter, hopeless distance (for that means space, that can be traversed)

between Him and us, I suddenly thought — Oh, if we had a Mediator — some one to stand upon the boundary land. If God would but reveal Himself, and tell us some little word that we might cling to as actual *truth*, among all the shadows. And then I thought how could He, how could He be likely to, but through the Perfect Man. And my ideal imagination of what such a revealed God would be, and what he would do and say to men in such a world, so tallied with all we know of Jesus, the Son of Man, that I was awed — thinking what things we may have been rejecting.

“I used to think if God revealed Himself to the world, He would have given some sign which would have compelled belief, — some great miraculous revelation, — but what could He have done which we should have been *sure* of as the work of Him? If He had blazed across the sky in some terrible grand spectacle — or given any conceivable display of power — how could we have known that it was not the work of some *lesser* divinity — some evil archangel or (if you dislike the Bible name) some inhabitant of Sirius or the Pleiads? If you will but think of it, the only possible way to convince us completely, and beyond chance of doubt, would have been to re-create for us the universe, before our eyes, — and even then

we should not be sure but it was some phantasm and deceit. Does it not seem probable that He would do just what this strange book says He had done? Coming as a man, doing a few simple miracles to attract men's attention and prove that He was at least more than mere man, making his miracles acts of beneficence, to prove that he was a *good*, not evil, Superhuman, proving his wisdom by his knowledge of the human heart and his ethical teachings, his unselfishness by his life and death, his perfect purity and truth by a sinless character? Even as I write, I am almost persuaded to be a Christian. I have prayed and do pray for light, — and if I seek truth with a pure desire and intention, I believe I shall find it at last."

He now debated the ministry and halted between two opinions. In this letter, written from Oakland in June, 1866, he seems to be sure of the negative decision; — who could help being deflected toward literature with a volume of poems in his trunk? — but within the year, he and Shearer were on their way to the Harvard Divinity School.

"I've been writing a lot of poetry. Shall want to consult you about it when I see you. Have got one poem of about a thousand lines and a lot of short ones, about as much more, enough to make a gay little volume, if illus-

trated a little, and got out nicely — but as to the inside don't know — the more I write the less satisfied I am with any of my doings in poetry — verily, art is different from handicraft as Grimm says — only the perfect works ought to be given to the public — a bad boot or a tolerable article of cloth may be worth offering for sale — but when it comes to offering tolerable art — after Tennyson and the Brownings — 't won't do — a poor devil ought to be hung for doing it — unless he be very poor, when his punishment might be commuted into imprisonment for life with only Tupper and the Country Parson for food and drink — in the way of stale toast or so.

"I'm reading Marx's 'Musical Composition.' Ever read it? . . .

"You ask . . . what I — we — want to do when we get on there. . . . I can't tell at all till I have got there, found how my health is going to be, how much chance of literary success there is for me, how much of musical . . .

"I can't ever preach — that has slowly settled itself in spite of my reluctant hanging on to the doubt — I can't solve the problems — only the great schoolmaster Death will ever take me through these higher mathematics of the religious principia — this side of his schooling, in these primary grades, I never can preach. — I shall teach school, I suppose."



It is one of the surprises in Sill's correspondence as in his writings to find how few are the allusions to the war. Except for his poem on the death of Lincoln, it never inspired his muse. Not that he was indifferent; he was too much of an abolitionist for that; but apparently he felt that the moral issue was being obscured, and his sympathies were estranged. In 1862 he wrote: —

“The war still drags along. We hear by telegraph the main facts — when there are any — about as soon as you do — but none of the particulars till the steamer brings the New York papers. I wish we had acknowledged the Southern Confederacy in the first of it, then wiped the pro-slavery blot out of our constitution and then pitched in and wiped out the South, with ‘Freedom’ out on our banners fair and square. I hope in the 1st of January <sup>1</sup> and an overruling Providence. God is just, and the right is bound to prevail in the end.”

Again in the same year he expresses his dissatisfaction with the course of events: —

“I hear that —— <sup>2</sup> is captured, and am not sorry. For he will be well treated, and it is *better* than fighting on the Devil's own side, especially with the risks of getting verily

<sup>1</sup> The 1st of January, 1863, — the date on which the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect.

<sup>2</sup> A friend on the Confederate side.



'thrown overboard' by some patriotic rifle ball. . . . The war 'drags its slow length along.' I wish we were well out of it. What a hideous farce it has been so far. I am glad you are not in it. A wise Providence will bring good out of it all — but through much that is evil. God's will be done!"

In 1863, after Emancipation had become a fact, there was a new note in his letters: —

"How people's ideas have advanced since the war commenced: We abolitionists are no longer the feeble minority — when so many of the faces of their own sons and brothers are begrimed with gunpowder and the smoke of battle, even the old wooden-headed Democrats don't look very critically to see whether the men who are fighting for the flag had white skins originally or black. They have tried hard to get up a war in this State — have fitted out pirates in the harbors (which Uncle Sam has nabbed), got up secret organizations and arms, etc., and several leading politicians have gone to Dixie to fight for Jeff and slavery. But there is too much New England, Ohio, and Michigan blood out here to allow their chivalry any chance."

Many years afterwards the recipient of some of these letters, jotting down his recollections of Sill, summed up the California period and added another to the list of professions which

beckoned to him during these years of uncertainty.

“A few months after reaching California, Sill decided to study law. But I fancy that his legal studies, if ever taken up, were very brief. It would be difficult to imagine a man of ability less fitted than Sill for practising law. Somewhat later he came under the influence of a physician, and for a while had some serious intention of studying and practising medicine. No doubt he was led in that direction by the desire of getting his living in a business that could be made, he thought, philanthropic. But afterwards he was glad that he did not engage in the study of medicine, for he had lost confidence in the specific certainty of medical knowledge. Another project that Sill very seriously considered, during his first stay in California, was going on to the stage as an actor.

“He told me that several times when in San Francisco, he passed and repassed the theatre trying to brace up his courage enough to go in and ask the manager for employment; but turned away without going in. If Sill could have endured the drudgery of an actor’s work and some other objectionable features of the business, there can be but little doubt that he would have risen so to eminence. He had most of the physical qualities — which are so important. He was tall, straight, well-shaped; his

features were regular, his face mobile, his eyes large and expressive; his voice was sonorous and flexible, and in utterance was agreeably distinct, so that what he said without effort was easily understood in a crowded room. In the movement of his arms and legs he was rather angular, but not so much so as Sir Henry Irving. There can hardly be any doubt that his capacity for mastering and learning to render a part was great; and his mind had so much original insight, and was so fertile in expedients, that his acting, when he had become thoroughly at home in the work, would have abounded in 'creations.' But, with all his qualifications, he could not quite make up his mind to seek a place on the stage. I do not know whether Sill ever seriously thought of painting or drawing as a lifework. He had an aptitude for both. With suitable instruction and persistent effort he could have won distinction with brush or crayon. Music Sill hungered for, as for necessary food. His taste, by natural affinity, was of the best. With great composers he seemed to be at one in their most serious moods. He acquired considerable skill in playing upon several musical instruments, but never practised enough to master any; yet in rendering some short production that he had become familiar with, he showed exquisite sensibility and power of expression."

## V

### SETTLING DOWN

SILL probably little realized, when he sailed from San Francisco in the summer of '66, that the two great questions of life were both to be answered for him so soon — that within the year he would be mated in love and settled in his life-work.

He sailed on the 18th of June, in company with his friend Shearer, still inseparable, on the same ship and under the same captain that had brought them 'round the Horn five years before. The last line before sailing was a hasty scrawl to his classmate, [Governor] Simeon Baldwin: —

DEAR SIMMUN, — I think this is about positively the last from this side the planet. I hope when we get East that you and I may have the opportunity to make each other's acquaintance.

In summing up the years I've been here I find that very few friends have passed the valves of the auricle and ventricle. Mighty few, as Sex [Shearer] w'd say, — and consequently there's room in that capacious organ

for not only the old shoots to remain uncrowded, but to enlarge and spread in it.

It is bedtime and my pipe is smoked out. I wish I had an angel to put her wings over me, as *you* have, I rejoice to reflect. I suppose this particular Beast is not considered quite worthy of Beauty yet. So good-night.

There was no journal on the return voyage, and apparently there were no letters, though there seems to have been some labor of the file upon the poems alluded to in an earlier letter, and there is a passage in "The Earth-Spirit's Voices" which seems to belong to this voyage rather than the earlier one. He has been writing of the voices of earth "appealing to mortal spirits across the barrier of the limited human intelligence," and he goes on: —

"At sea, also, I once heard this unavailing cry. It was a hundred miles, and more, from the coast of Brazil. The night was clear starlight, the breeze light and steady, so that we were sailing silently. The stillness, indeed, was so unusual that we were all leaning at the weather rail, listening to it, and peering far off into the vanishing waste of waves. Suddenly a distant cry arose from the night; no one could say where, or how. Then it was twice repeated: not a human cry, that is certain: perhaps a sea-bird's, but not like that of any bird or beast



I ever heard. If it expressed anything, it was not pain nor fear, but some intense, infinitely lonely desire.”<sup>1</sup>

Sill and Shearer had determined to go to the Harvard Divinity School, there to study theology; having selected the place because, as one of their friends surmised, “they would not be required there to believe so much as in other American schools” — a design which, in Sill’s case, was destined to defeat; for, as the same friend confesses, “the beliefs were too much for him”; or, as he put it himself not unscornfully sometime later, “I found it was the same old whine in new bottles.” But that is to anticipate. Now, arriving in New York in the late fall of ’66, the travellers went on to Cambridge to look the ground over, and Sill then turned back for a visit with his relatives in Ohio before settling down to texts and commentators. An eventful enough visit it proved. From Cuyahoga Falls he writes in December: —

DEAR H —, — I intended to let you hear of my safe arrival here before this, but visitors can’t write letters, and I find myself a visitor, and almost stranger, at my “home” — so long have I been away.

I was in hopes to have heard from you, but

<sup>1</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*, pp. 48, 49.

I suppose you are waiting to know where I am. I found things in Cambridge more favorable than I had expected; they will pay most of my expenses, furnish room, books, etc., and a man's tenets or intentions are not in the question at all with them — which it is gay.

I shall go there sans doubt, and commence with the term at the end of February. I may decide to go right on there next month and settle myself. Whenever I go it is my hope and intention to stop among you for a season. Ralph says his bed is always twoable, and I want to get acquainted with you all. It was a little snip of a "see" which I got at you there, yet I enjoyed it very much.

MRS. FLORRIE! The music I received at the depot and thank you very much. I have been longing for those "Songs Without Words" for a great while. I believe I love Mendelssohn best of all. I wish I knew something about music. It was very kind in you to send me that music. I have n't heard it yet. The piano here is in a vile state of out-of-tuniteness, but is to be reformed so soon as the man from Cleveland can come down to our little village to it. Then I shall hear them all, though I can't play them. My fingers don't know how to find their way without great deliberation and bungling. I can only pick out little easiest places from good music. Perhaps that is something like the way

in which my present acquaintance with you stands. Indeed, I don't know but it would hold of H —, too, now.

I think I shall see you in about a month.

Affectionately your friend,

ED. ROWLAND SILL.

This miserable climate! A perfect caricature of our California rainy season! I've had a cold and the blues ever since I got home here.

Sweetest privilege of friendship — an ear whereinto one may growl! May n't I?

In the next letter the poems reappear, and the plan for a book, "The Hermitage, and Other Poems," — the only volume offered to the public in Sill's lifetime, — takes more definite form. It came out something more than a year later and had a reception not wholly novel for a poet's first book, of which more when the time comes. Meantime, the past tense and the tone of the comment sound the final chord in the little love song that quavered so uncertainly in California: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, XMAS, '66.

DEAR H —, — I am sorry you have had so much nuisance in that old Concertina — peace to its ashes. — Let 'er repose on some shelf of yours. I am greatly obliged by your effort to lay the ghost, but if it won't "down,"

let it stay up and be ——. I perceive it will be like poor Sparrowgrass' hoss, which he could n't even get anybody to steal.

You just go to work and get over that "separation" idea as an attachment to the Theol. idea of Sill. Going to be nothing of the kind. Is thy servant to be a Jesuit? Nay, not even a priest. A "Minister" if you will — are *we* not all ministering spirits? Impossible to separate us — and I not only feel confident that I can't be done so to, but I know that so long as I live I shall be *trying*, at least, to be the kind of man whom you must like and cleave to.

I don't think you'd better send the Poems back — I'll send you soon a piece to insert in Hermitage — a footnote, as who should say, "This whelp was in love, that he whines so." Also some short pomes.

DEAR MRS. FLORRIE: — Merry Xmas and a most Happy New Year to you. I think you write a most delightful business letter. I am afraid you spoke a little too warmly about the poems, though I'm glad Mr. L—— likes them, so do I — some of them — but not all. I liked Bob W.'s<sup>1</sup> ever so muchly.

The Hermitage is subjective, of course, — so is Life, to *us*. The public must be educated to

<sup>1</sup> Robert Kelley Weeks, of the class of 1862. He published several poems in the *Nation*, and a couple of small volumes, got the enthusiastic approval of Stoddard and Stedman, and died young.



be more subjective themselves. "Pomes" are not to tickle them but to help them up. I don't want it to be any mere dramatic — a "dram" in the "attic" is not the way I write my poetry, but by sunshine, on cold water, in the same room I live in. Could perhaps put in some Swinburne, but don't approve of looking at life from that sty and trough.

I am really glad at heart that you and H—— enjoyed reading my things, for I like you both so much, and should be very suspicious of poems which did not please you at all.

I am having a pleasant visit at my uncle's here — a sort of second father he is to me. But I am having some perplexities to manage and worried a good deal — hope it will be over in a little, when I will write you less like a maniac. I am curious to see your footnotes on my margins.

Yours very —

ED. R. SILL.

The next letter tells its own story, and needs no comment.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, Jan. 27, 1867.

I would not inconvenience you so constantly, but I have changed my plans so much as to make it necessary to bother somebody and I prefer you.



So much for biz —

Now open your ears for some news. You and Mrs. Florrie are hereby invited to my wedding on Thursday evening, February 7th. My cousin Bess is to be the bride. Not the "little Mrs. Browning" whom you suspected, but her sister. I smiled at you having hit the nail without having hit it on the head. Elizabeth Newbury Sill (daughter of my best uncle and my guardian all through my college days), sometimes called Bess, also Bessie, also Lizzie, also Eliz. It is a love match which has been about ten years getting up. I've loved her ever since I was a little chap, and she me. We always tacitly considered the consanguinity as a barrier, till, lately, we have decided to smash it — and very lately have decided to marry soon, and yesterday fixed the day as above stated.

Are you glad I'm going to be happy at last? I have always longed so for a satisfied, unimpeded love, given and taken — now I have it. I need not tell *you*, who have been there, that I cannot love other friends less but always more for this — the other boys probably can't understand that so well except, to be sure, as you have made the demonstration.

We shall stay here a week after marrying, then visit a friend in Titusville, Pennsylvania, for two days, then to Brooklyn, and in New York I shall see you. Some day Mrs. Bess and

I will walk in on you at the store and damage your business for a while. I am going to Cambridge all the same, and Bess is to stay here till I get through there. Her father wants her for housekeeper and pet till I can and must take her away from him.

From New York she comes back here with some relatives, and I stay and see you folks awhile and then go up to Cambridge.

I am in a hurry to write some other necessary letters so good-night. Remember us, you two, Thursday night of next week, and *think* your good wishes across to us.

Yours, doubly,

E. R. S.

Good-night.

Sill's stay in Cambridge was too short for the best results; but the unsatisfactoriness of it did not lie wholly, nor perhaps even chiefly, in its brevity. Had he remained longer in those surroundings he might have penetrated into the currents of high and eager intellectual life which ran so strongly there, but it is not certain that he would. His pride, his native reserve, and his lack of contacts with the contemporaneous thought of America, as well as of Europe, made it unlikely. Nevertheless, that a genuine poet, of no unworthy achievement, should come into the neighborhood of Lowell, Longfellow,

Holmes, Emerson, and Norton and yet meet none of them, seems hardly short of a tragedy. Among the fruits of the months which he spent at the Divinity School was the hymn, "Send down thy truth, O Lord," written for a fellow-student's ordination and now a favorite, not only in the Unitarian communion, but beyond its boundaries.

The letters from Cambridge, such as are preserved, are all addressed to classmates. Few as they are, they tell the story in outline, indicating his lessening interest in theology and his growing realization of the necessity of making a living by some other means. His attempts to make light of the rebuffs at the hands of editors and of his own expectations from the forthcoming volume need not deceive us. Poets at twenty-six are not a callous folk, and there never was a less indifferent member of the *genus irritabile*.

CAMBRIDGE, April 8, 1867.

DEARLY BELOVED [his classmate, Henry Holt], — Yours have been received, but I have been waiting for a good chance when I should feel like writing a letter. The Ticknor one you enclosed was my regular one, of course. No comments. I can't avoid the conclusion that the "Atlantic" and I don't agree as to what is decent poetry. I warn you in time — if you

take hold of those poems you'll have the Mags down on 'em and the books unsold. They're not popular — whether they're good or not. I have n't had the requisite cultivation; and besides my knocking around and feeling the cold shoulder of things has n't improved the imaginative powers — the delicacy is blunted, and bloom gone — if they were there. I believe that born into a rich Englishman's son's shoes, like all of those chaps, I could have added to the world's little stock of poetry. As it is, I'm out and some one else is in, and there's no help for it. So don't get into any scrape. I warn you, I shan't feel at all more seedy than at present if you send that bundle up to me instead of to the printer. I grow less and less desirous to have them published every day I live. . . .

Of course I need n't say that I'm blue as the devil — started on a long track — straight track, you see — no curves concealing hidden and pleasant perhapses — pretty sandy, and only two foot-prints most of the way.

She' may be here next year, but 't will cost like thunder, and I see plainly that there is no hope of side earnings. This Taintor thing [College songs] is no go. I am trying to get him up some things, but I make a melancholy failure. Try to write some songs for young ones when you're in the dumps, and see what you think of it! I'm going to send some things to him in

your care because he was to change his address and I don't know it. Will you address 'em to him? Wretched things, not worth a cent a thousand — I wrote till towards morning on 'em t' other night and condemned 'em to the fire in the morning — that's my present style. I'm not pregnant and how can anything be born? The god has n't embraced my Muse for a good many months.

Good place to study here, poor place for anything else, so I won't even try any longer to write a letter.

Now I'm going at Mr. Cousin's ideas of the idea of God. Mr. Monkey's chattering about the man who threw a stone at him the other day — or was it cakes he threw? The monkey can't tell.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., Apr., 1867.

I am enjoying my opportunities here hugely. They give me books and let me alone — what more could a man ask? Besides, some good lectures outside — Agassiz, etc. I went to a sacred concert last Sunday night in Music Hall. It was very fine — I don't know that I ever enjoyed music so much. Did n't hear the great organ, though, so I am going over to hear that in an orchestral concert this P.M. Sunday



night there was glorious orchestra music, and Arbuckle had a cornet arrangement of 'Adelaide' with orchestra which nearly drew my heart out of my body. I have always raved about that song, but never heard it perfectly given before. What a splendor brass is when exquisitely played — how it winds and winds into one's very Ego, and tangles itself up with the emotions and passions and soars up with them. The wood sings all *around* one — the strings wail and implore *to* us — but the brass enters in and carries one off bodily. Do you concur? I want to hear that great organ — it was music only to look at it — a great, dark, shadowy cathedral looming up at the end of the immense Hall — Apollo Belvedere up in a niche opposite, looking scornful, as if to say that all that solemn, shadowy, bitter-sweet music — the heartbroken triumph — the fire of tears — is poor by the side of his memories of the Greek health and energy, and music that was sunshine dissolved in wine. — But one looks back to the statue of the Master in front of the organ, and thinks the man is truer than the false god.

Delightful spring weather — trees coming out — grass green. Nature is all under good subjection, though, about here — not even a Tutor's Lane to refresh the wild part of a man.

Wisconsin gone for Woman's Suffrage! . . . It's gay, is n't it? — Massachusetts must hang her head and be second chop hereafter.

I think pomes<sup>1</sup> must be anonymous. Are you going to arrange for summer?

CAMBRIDGE, May 22, '67.

DEAR H—, . . . Sex and I have been talking about Zschokke — have his stories been translated? If not, why would n't it be a bully idea to do it? And why could n't Sex and I translate, say a half dozen or eight or ten or two, to put in a volume together. I have a volume here containing twenty-one stories — "Zschokke's Novellen." They are very fine, to my taste, and ought to be as popular here as in Vaterland. What say you?

The way I look at it as concerning the owl <sup>1</sup> is this—that solemn bird has confined its hooting lately to lightish things. You need something more solid—for a change. Zschokke is a sort of mixture of Jean Paul, G. P. R. James, and Kingsley. There's love, ethics, political economy, and transcendentalism. . . .

He had evidently been invited to look up some facts and personal impressions of Tennyson among those in Boston and vicinity who

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to the colophon of Holt's publishing house which bears the figure of an owl.

knew the poet. The brief reply points again his isolation in Cambridge — of which he was keenly conscious: —

“I could n’t unearth anything here about Tenny[son], ’cause I don’t know a soul and can’t know ’em — to “root around among my landlady and my washerwoman would n’t be productive.”

Summer found him again in the hospitable home at Cuyahoga Falls and in a mood of comparative calm. The book appeared in the spring of 1868 and was received with the severity which, for no explainable reason, it sometimes befalls a first book of verse to encounter. The reviewer in the “Nation,” then, as now, looked to by the author with peculiar solicitude, was particularly harsh. Together with other severities, and the indifference of the public, this sufficiently discouraged Sill from further publication. Never again did he venture into the public with a book. It was only after his death that the now familiar little blue volumes — “Poems,” “The Hermitage,” and “Hermione” — were brought out. Later still came “The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill” and the “Collected Poems.” Meanwhile the modest square green volumes of 1868 have become dear to booklovers and listed among collectors’ “desiderata.”

As to the translating, he had misjudged his temperament. He was far too high-strung for that plodding sort of labor, as he discovered when he undertook to put Richter's "Coöperative Stores" into English.

CAMBRIDGE, MONDAY MORNING.

DEAR H——, — We neither of us understand French. Your German chap better take last chapter and go on backward to meet us — we can't go any faster than now. I have been putting in every available hour since I began — it is the hardest sort of stuff we could possibly undertake, half the words not in the dictionary, only to be guessed at. Customs, etc., referred to which I never heard of and also must guess at. I have n't touched study or recitation since I commenced; there was a recess last week — anniversary week, and I flunked all the meetings except one — the Free Religion meeting. Forty stories and a dozen poems would be child's play to one work on Polit. Econ. for a foreigner. Your German cove will have a good deal of it to do, if it is to come out "immediately," and I'm very glad you have got him at hand.

Had I better call Statuten *rules*, and how in the name of all the Teufels shall we translate Markenges hafte — ticket-method is the nearest I can come to it. How much shall I call a *franc* in cents? A *thaler* I have computed at

.72 — taking it from this author's statement that  $6.66\frac{2}{3}$  thalers = 1 pound sterling.

Rushing this so, I have no time to correct phraseology, or think of notes, but a revision may be possible in proof-sheets. Please answer immediately.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

P.S. We can't make it go an inch faster, and there's no one here who could help. You had better put the German chap hard at it, and unless he's a sight faster than we, two of them.

The end of the academic year saw the end of Sill's relation to the Divinity School and he relinquished theology, though, as appears from the next letter, not without a lingering backward look: for he was a preacher all his life long.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, August, 1867.

SUNDAY P.M.

DEAR HENRY, — I wonder how and where this hot afternoon finds you. It is too hot here to do anything, yet I am moved to write you a sweltering word or two.

I have determined not to return to Cambridge. There could be no pulpit for me after going through there, except as an independent, self-supported minister, which of course is open to any one with a purse. I came re-



luctantly to that conclusion. Another person, even with my opinions in theology, might have judged differently. It is no sentimentalism with me — it is simply a solemn conviction that a man must speak the truth as fast and as far as he knows it — truth to *him*. I may be in error — but what I *believe* is my sacred truth, and must not be diluted. When I get money enough to live on I mean to preach religion as I believe in it. Emerson could not preach, and now I understand why.

So, the alternatives.

School teaching always has stood first. No decent salaries in this country. No freedom to follow my own way. No position available so far as I know. Hence, California.

After a quiet summer in Ohio, he returned to New York, there to make trial whether it was in him to earn his living by his pen. The fragments preserved of his writing at this time reveal his shortcomings as a journalist. He was too severe in subject and manner for the New York newspaper of the sixties. The story of the adventure is told in a single letter. The prose fragments which follow possess more than a little interest as giving his view of New York, and of the poems, one — “Summer Afternoon” — has a place in one of the slender volumes collected after his death.

BROOKLYN, N.Y., Nov., '67.

I came to New York something over two months ago. Found nothing better than helping edit a one-horse paper. Did it six weeks. Did n't suit, and was n't suited, and quit. Am now translating a German romance [Ran's "Mozart"]. . . . It will take me six weeks or more. . . .

What a horrid bilk New York is, speaking of bilks. And the way they brag here — Lord John of the East — you'd think there was no other centre, and very little if any circumference. Fact is, they have so little conception here of the things there are to be known, that they easily believe they know it all. A man who never sees a tree, or a blade of grass, or a bit of sky, or stops still long enough to look down into another human being's eyes, of course has no interrogation points awakened in him. He has learned to know the streets of the city — which he remembers being ignorant of when he came here — and he has learned the cheap conventionalities — which he blushed not to know, once — and there's nothing else to learn, is there? So he knows it all, does n't he? And how he swells up and swaggers on the strength of it! . . . I don't think a man needs any further provocation to cut his throat, in simple moral nausea, than to walk up Broadway, and then down it on the other side, after he has got suf-

ficiently used to the rattletebang to have his eyes about him, so as to examine the faces, expressions, of features, gait, gestures, etc. . . .

TIMOTHY GRASS TO BOHEMIAN GLASS

*To Bohemian Glass, Esq., New York City: —*

DEAR COUSIN, In the midst of my rural solitudes here in the little village of Greenville, as I have walked about the quiet fields, or through the autumnal woods, I have been thinking how "unfriended, melancholy, slow" our country life is, compared with the keen and swift current of yours in the great city. And for some weeks (for it takes us a good while to make up our minds in the country), I have been resolving to reach out an epistolary hand to you, Cousin Glass, and ask you to write me occasional letters, as you can snatch the time from the whirl of your city avocations, giving me your ideas upon men and books, and the incidents and accidents of modern life. I say "modern life," for I well know that I am behind the times. You know my library. It consists of old books, for the most part. The old classics, the old standard authors — well, I believe I should cleave to them if I knew the moderns as well, but the moderns I do not know. Can you not, from time to time, give me little glimpses of the literature which comes and goes, foam-like, on the current of the present? And will you not, at the same time, tell me what is this great mystery of New York life, what are its pleasures, what does it give in compensation for the noise and hurry, and the absence of all sweet natural sounds and sights? For me, you know my pleasures; the morning walks, these breezy autumn days, golden alike with sunshine and the yellowing leaves; the

fragrant air of the still woods, the quiet sail down the winding river, with the ripples purling and plashing against the prow; the evenings in the old library at home, alone but seldom lonely, with my books around me, and the little parlor organ — the gilt pipes are rather tarnished, Cousin Glass, but the tones breathe purer and mellower for every passing year. There I sit and read, and meditate, and listen to the cheery crickets, and the Rune of the river; and if sometimes a little lonesome twinge comes over my back, like a sudden chill from a draft of air, I pat my dog's head, and look into his big, moist eyes (he looks me in the eyes like a man — did you ever see a dog do it?), and wonder how far aloof his soul will follow mine through the gradations of the future after we die. For we're two old vagabonds, Leo and I, young as we are, and good for not much of anything but to lie in the sun.

Well, I write poetry now and then. Your well-informed and judicious critical papers there in the city, which you have sent me, I see with grief do not approve of this employment. No doubt they have some good and wise reason for this opinion, but of course it would be impossible for me to ask such eminent and learned writers what it is. Perhaps they, like yourself, cousin Glass, have been so long in the splendid and glittering life of the city with its wisdom and polish and art, that they have forgotten how beautiful the woods are and the gurgling brooks, and the stars that dust the water's dusky bosom with their fire. Perhaps they do not know how one is driven, as by "a certain divine madness," to hollow out in words a place for these splendors of nature and set them there, carved into expression with whatsoever fidelity one is capable of.

Well, Cousin Glass, I am writing too long a



letter. Hoping for a speedy reply, I subscribe myself your loving cousin,

TIMOTHY GRASS.

P.S. I send some verses which I wrote in the summer, perhaps they will sound a little like an echo now that autumn is come.

*Summer Afternoon*

Far in hollow mountain cañons  
Brood, with purple-folded pinions,  
Flocks of drowsy distance-colors on their nests,  
And the bare, round slopes, for forests  
Have cloud-shadows, floating forests,  
On their breasts.

Winds are wakening and dying,  
Questions low with low replying,  
Through the oaks a hushed and trembling whisper goes;  
Faint and rich the air with odors,  
Hyacinth and spicy odors  
Of the rose.

Even the flowerless acacia  
Is one flower, such slender stature,  
With its latticed leaves a-tremble in the sun:  
They have shower-drops for blossoms.  
Quivering globes of diamond blossoms,  
Every one.

In the blue of heaven holy  
Clouds of floating, floating slowly,  
Pure in snowy robes and sunny silver crown,  
And they look like gentle angels —  
Leisure-full and loitering angels,  
Looking down.

Half the birds are wild with singing,  
And the rest with rhythmic winging  
Sing in melody of motion to the sight;



Every little sparrow twitters,  
 Cheerily chirps, and cheeps, and twitters  
 His delight.

Sad at heart amid the splendor,  
 Dull to all the radiance tender,  
 What can I for such a world give back again?  
 Could I only hint the beauty —  
 Some least shadow of the beauty —  
 Unto men!

TO MR. TIMOTHY GRASS, GREENVILLE

DEAR COUSIN TIMOTHY, — Got yours — glad to hear from you — will be pleased to correspond. We city folks need little whiffs of the woods and meadows now and then, to keep our hearts in the right place. Must n't expect much from me in the way of letters — have to write in a hurry, you know.

You seem to think we're awfully wise, here in New York. Well, our life here is a good deal like railroad travelling — whizz — bang — whirling by all sorts of things at a great rate, as if 't were for dear life. We on the inside poke our heads out of the windows, and look very wise — you'd think we knew all about it — but we don't, Cousin Timothy — we don't. People out in the fields alongside half the time know a good deal more about it than we do — but we look as if we did, and a good many times we think we do; so it comes to the same thing, in most people's estimation.

We're not all so good here as you seem to think, either. It's a streak of fat and a streak of lean. Great many fine men here — great many good books written here — eloquent preachers — able lecturers, and all that — but some of us are great scamps, Cousin Timothy — great scamps. Yet, hosts of good men here, too — young brains, and

old ones, that are clear as a bell — not to be taken in by lies in opinion or lies in practice — true hearts that are brave as lions — splendid fellows puttering over dry day's-works — you would n't know them till some pinch comes — then you find them always in the right place. It's a little like needles in a haymow, to find them — no — more like hunting the needles with a mighty magnet — every man with a magnet in his spinal column somewhere, that draws his like out of the crowd and fastens them to him. Here are a thousand faces, all strangers — all busy — suddenly you find you know every one you want to among them. Unconsciously the magnets were at work — out come your kith and kin.

We are terribly busy here — blood thermometers are kept up to the boiling point — pulses tick fast, like little trip-hammers. No meditation — no musings. All is business, business, business. My brother, Blone Glass, who has tastes, says: "'T is all very well; but this doing business is *such a waste of time!*" 'T is a good deal so, I admit. Men here are mainly bent on getting something for *themselves* — money — houses — position — well, people generally *are* bent on that. Human nature is mostly selfish, Cousin Timothy — i.e., out of our family. Still their toil and trouble goes for the most part to somebody else, after all. We are all better off for their shrewdness and energy. They "build better than they know." That's Emerson — you know him? Too modern for you, I suppose. That is nothing — turn him upside down, and imagine 'tis a mouldy Brahmin, discoursing in the Punjab fifty thousand years ago, and you can't help liking him. I know you cling to your old-fashioned bards. But Emerson is worth the whole nursery of them.

He is a perfect old telegraph line from the Infinite to this world. People don't like him because he is condensed and oracular, like all telegrams. They won't take the trouble to understand the message — prefer to get its substance, diluted, in the morning papers. You want to know about modern writers — get Emerson and read him. Take his poems first. You'll forgive his style easier as apologized for by the music and the rhythm.

Speaking of poetry — yours was very good — only Blone says that "*Acacia* does n't rhyme with *stature*, and never will!" And, Cousin Timothy! Don't write a thing in verse till you *see* it, sharp and clear before your mind's eye as a flash of lightning on a black sky. No danger but that you will *feel* truly enough. Mind you *see* truly, first. *Good eyesight* — that's what the world wants.

That's what we get in the city, too. If a man's eyes are not open, he gets run over every time he crosses the street. And that's the way the purblind fellows are disposed of — run over, Cousin Timothy — by sharper competitors, or by the press, or by the march of ideas, or some other driving institution. And we that survive get our wits sharpened at last.

What we want from writers is new truths, truly put. If you have got one, in politics, in religion, in art, in philosophy, or in patent medicines — you are our man.

I, too, send some lines. They're not dignified. We can't spend time to be dignified, in New York. You may not like the subject. Violets don't spring up and fade on Broadway, Cousin Timothy, but wall-eyed old steeds do.

Good-bye,

Yours truly,

BOHEMIAN GLASS.

*The Song of the Horse*

A poor old stage-horse, lank and thin,  
Not much else but bones and skin,  
I jog along, week out, week in,  
Kicked, and cursed, and meanly fed,  
Jammed in the side and jerked by the head —  
And the thing I can't at all make out  
Is, what on earth it's all about?

Why was I made to toil and tug  
For this odd little human bug,  
Two-legged, dumpy as a jug,  
Who sits aloft, my ribs to batter —  
Or why was *he* made, for that matter?  
And, if I needs must be created,  
Why is it that I was not fated  
To prance and curvet, finely mated,  
Silver-harnessed, sleek and fat,  
With groom and blanket, and all that?

Here I go, day after day,  
Pounding and slipping down Broadway,  
Dragging these curious biped things,  
With fore-legs gone, and yet no wings —  
Where they all go to *I* don't know,  
Nor why in the world they hurry so,  
Nor what good use Heaven puts them to!

It was n't my fault, you see, at all,  
That my joints grew big, and my muscles small,  
And so I missed of a rich man's stall,  
I'm clumsy, crooked, stupid, slow,  
Yet the meanest horse is a horse, you know,  
And his ribs can ache with the kick or blow,  
As well as the glossiest nags that go.  
O Lord, how long will they use me so?  
And when may the equine spirit go  
Where glorified horses stand in a row,  
Switching their bright tails to and fro,



Careless of either wheel or whoa —  
 Where oats are always *à propos*,  
 And flies don't grow!  
 Oh, no!

O!

#### BOHEMIAN GLASS AS AN EDITOR

##### *A Lamentation*

*To Mr. Timothy Grass: —*

DEAR COUSIN TIMOTHY, — 'T is pleasant to imagine you there in your quiet library these chilly fall evenings, putting up your slippered feet in a chair before the fireplace, pulling down some "quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore," and having a good old drowsy, comfortable time of it. It makes "literature" seem a very nice thing to you, of course. Oh, you leisurely, unmolested fellows! What good, nonsensical, useless, blessed hours you can spend over books!

You've no idea how sick we get of literature here. You've no idea what cartloads of stupid, wooden, flat, seasick stuff is written and printed here, day after day and year after year — you've no idea, and if you had, it would make you weep and howl. The periodical literature — you escape most of it out there, where, in a measure, remoteness acts as a kind of strainer, and gives you only the finer and more enduring writings. You, who have a sort of veneration for a writer, as if he were in some way a second cousin of Shakespeare and Plato — you should see the stuff which a person on a daily paper is obliged to see, in exchanges, periodicals, new publications, and so on. You should know what helpless donkeys some "writers" are. From "Godey's Lady's Book" (which Blone calls the "Great Female Mind Enfeeblor") up to the last



new treatise on the "Inscrutable Periodicity of Perihelions."

Then, too, you who adore the fine arts so much, should see the pictures in the police papers, which are posted up proudly at all the news stands, and surrounded by crowds of rapt and ravished gazers. The most filthy, brutal, beastly, abominable woodcuts — and the bloated and leering fool-faces gloating over them, from one end of Broadway to the other!

Ah! Cousin Timothy. — "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good." But that was ages ago — ages before Babylon was builded. It was all garden, then, and there was neither emigration, rum, nor fashionable religion.

A writer on a paper has other crosses, too, besides a compulsory acquaintance with current literature. He has his unpleasantnesses, "late" and early. For instance, I noticed a man's book in the paper. I did n't say it was nice. It *was n't* nice. He met me on Broadway. With a furious glare he roared, "Sir, you're an ass!" I replied, with a placid smile, "Sir, what of it?" He went away.

I did n't deny his charge. Relatively speaking, perhaps, there was some truth in it. The fact is we are *all* a little tinged with a gentle asinine element. There's a certain amount of dulness, obstinacy, wrong-headedness, about all of us, if you get us in just the right light to show it.

Strange what a natural and instinctive desire there is in the human breast to call somebody else an ass! We come up against somebody's particular point of stupidity or perversity (or what seems so to our plans), and the soul is absolutely refreshed and exhilarated by expressing our feeling towards a

fellow-being in that Saxon epithet. How my heart bleeds for a man when I see him wrought up to exactly that pitch of emotion, but restrained and muzzled from satisfying his inward yearning by some conventional idea of dignity or politeness.

'T is getting cold nights and mornings here in New York. The poor children that one sees, with their bare legs and their naked feet on the pavement, begin to strike one with a shivery sensation.

The placards in the drug-shop windows advertising "ice-cold soda-water" are getting to have a dreary aspect, as one glances at them of a drizzly cold morning. But winter is n't winter in New York, you know. It is philharmonics, and brilliant gatherings, and opera — marrying and giving in marriage. Winter is no winter here for the rich, Cousin Timothy; for the poor, O 't is horrible! Freezing and starvation, fiery rum, when no longer food is possible, hunger and cold goading men to robbery and murder, and women to despair and worse. God pity the city poor in winter, men will not.

I enclose my usual splash of verses.

In haste, yours truly,

BOHEMIAN GLASS.

### *The News Girl*

A tiny, blue-eyed, Elfin lass  
Meets me upon the street I pass,

In going to the ferry;  
Barefooted, scantily clothed, and thin,  
With little weazen cheeks and chin,

Yet always chirk and merry:  
Ever merry, however pale,

I always hear her, as I draw near her —

"'Ere's THE MAIL, sir !— MAIL? — MAIL?"

With that same piping little tune,  
She waits there every afternoon,  
Selling her bunch of papers;  
She scarcely looks aside to see  
What's passing by, of grief or glee —  
No childish tricks or capers;  
Her pattering bare feet never fail  
To run and meet me, and chirping greet me,  
"Ere's THE MAIL, sir! — MAIL? — MAIL?"

Her dingy frock is scant and torn,  
Her old, old face looks wan and worn,  
Yet always sweet and sunny;  
Week in, week out, she is the same —  
I asked her once what was her name,  
And, jingling all her money,  
Holding a paper up for sale,  
The little midget answered, "Bridget!  
Want THE MAIL, sir? — MAIL? — MAIL?"

I wonder where she goes at night,  
And in what nook the poor young sprite  
Finds room for rest and sleeping;  
I wonder if her little bones  
Go home to blows and cuffs, and tones  
That roughly set her weeping —  
When, rainy days, the pennies fail  
And few were buying, for all her crying  
"Ere's THE MAIL, sir! — MAIL? — MAIL?"

O rich and happy people! you  
Whose ways are smooth, and woes are few,  
Whose life brims o'er with blisses,  
Pity the little patient face,  
That never knows the tender grace  
Of kind caress or kisses,  
For you, the blessings never fail;  
For her 't is only to wait there lonely  
And cry: "THE MAIL, sir? — MAIL? — MAIL?"

At this last winding of the road as it enters upon the long straight stretch, it is interesting to see how the bends and turns of the course looked to Sill in retrospect. In writing to one of his own students at the University of California years later, he said: —

“You are getting on toward the close of the Second Act — the college days: and no doubt the management of the Third Act begins to occupy your mind a good deal — and perhaps to vex it a little. What to do with one’s life gets to be a large question toward the close of the senior year. In my own, I was saved a part of the question, for my health was frail and threatened me a little, so that the *immediate* duty was plain enough — to cut and run; which I did, on a long sea voyage; it was a toss-up which way it should be, among all the oceans and continents, but it happened to be to California. I had pretty much determined that I would try to get a better aim than the common ones. ‘I could not hide that *some* had *striven*,’ at least, whatever they had ‘attained.’ Egoism, pure and simple, had somehow always struck me — theoretically — as mighty paltry for a grown-up man; a kind of permanent *child*-condition. And I cast about for some way of combining service with bread and butter. The ministry, or teaching, I finally settled it must be for me. It was a little nar-

row . . . to confine the choice to those two. I can see now that there are lots of ways to serve — more even than ways to get bread and butter. . . .

“I . . . took a saddle-horse, rode about the country and hunted up a locality I liked the looks of, with a clean little school-house and wholesome-looking farm people about it, and taught that country school. I found there was no difficulty in *doing* it, after a fashion, at least; so I kept on. . . .

“One thing is clear: a year or two of teaching is good honest work for any one — an advantage to others, and to self (for others in the future), as well. But if you knew you should then go into medicine, I think I should not wait, but go into it at once. You may think medicine ministers only to the body — but, 1, the body is a necessary condition of higher things, and 2, a good physician finds himself in one of the most influential positions in the community, for good. Nor need his work be confined to his lancet and pill-boxes (though there’s a nobleness about those, when you think of the relations of mind and body), but there is an endless range of studies, and perhaps of writing, possible to such a profession.

“One thing we must try to realize. Our individual drop of force is only one in a great sea. Perhaps, even if we saw just what particular



piece of work the world most needed, we should not be the man for it. I see a number of things that need tremendously to be done; but I can't do them. I was n't properly endowed, or I had n't, and could n't have got, the training for it. Meantime I do what my hand finds to do and try not to fret . . . . Anyway, the thing is, not to spoil *too* much time and brains trying to be sure of the absolutely best work—but to use all reasonable effort to see, and then—even if in vexatious doubt—to strike into the most *probably* sensible course, and work like a locomotive. One can at least fix his course for a *year* ahead—and agree with his conscience to let him alone to work at that *for* the year. And so year by year, if no other way is possible to one's temperament, one can get through a fine stent of work in a lifetime."

The summer he spent as usual in Ohio and succeeded in settling matters with himself. If Literature would n't give him a living Teaching must.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, June, 1868.

When a man is actually living, he and Nature laying their heads together, and *things* occupying whole days, all this use of *symbols* of things—words—becomes a sort of mouldy amusement, and my portfolio goes to sleep when I get into real outdoor life. I never got so near to Nature as this year—that is, to

homely Nature — not, the sublime. I mean to the good old mother Nature of gardens and ploughed fields and river and tame wood — the mistress sort of Nature I have had more to do with at some past times.

So I have not written any poetry lately, but have had some real satisfactory thinks and good useful times. What fun it is to see one's muscles swelling up a little from pushing a plane and handling spade and hoe, and to feel one's backbone stiffening up as by deposits of grit along the vertebræ. And what a wholesome thing it is to plant one's foundation on the ground under an apple tree, and soberly think — while digging up the sod with a dull jackknife — how life is a pretty fair genial thing after all, and how happiness evidently is n't the only thing the gods consider good for man; and how thoroughly it pays to try to keep healthy like the apple trees and the beasties and the winds and soil — and kick pleasures to the Devil, and be sturdy and real.

Of course, one gets peevish and sentimental and sour and all other bad traits on him at times afterward, but he can look back for weeks to one thorough-going sensible forenoon, and bolster himself thereby. . . .

It is a thousand pities that such fellows as you and I should n't be able to earn a decent living at some employment which would n't

grind dreadfully. But what the Lord wants us to learn, I begin to suspect, *is* to grind — and that in the dreadfulest manner. . . .

The fact is, we ought to have learned some one practical disagreeable trade — not profession, for it is better to be honest (the laws of the universe being as they are) . . . and we ought to have pitched into it as other people do — but this fair witch of poetry trips a man up.

You say you've got a dead book — so have I. Jolly, ain't it? I'm content over mine, though, and was long ago. If my shoemaking does n't suit, the shoes must lie on the shelf till I learn the trade better — that's all.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, Aug. 15, 1868.

. . . I have made my mind up (and my spinal column, too, I trust — stiff and solid) to earn my b. and b. so far as possible by work that shall for *other* reasons, as well, seem useful. That 's the reason I prefer to teach rather than go into business or law, etc. I wish you New Haven fellows would collar every graduating man and make him see that thing — that the mere fact of a certain occupation's being the means of sustenance, is no honest claim for its adoption or continuance. I believe every baby that's born can make the longer or shorter transition from cradle to coffin, decently, hon-

estly, and comfortably (relatively speaking), by letting their hands find to do only such things as are intrinsically good and useful. Probably three-quarters of them (the graduates) ought to learn a trade or work a farm. I wish I could annually take nine-tenths of the *law* candidates and stake them out ("picket" them) in a ten-acre lot with a few bags of seed, a hoe, and the Bible — there to be left for life.

I sympathize with your longing at times for an ascetic bout with the devil that is in us. But we both know (appealing to Philip sober) that seven devils would come to the funeral of the one smashed one, if we tried it ever so thoroughly. So don't let's do it. And so far from running away from each other (a part of asceticism), let's run into each other all we can. . . .

With the fall he got fairly to work at his teaching: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Nov. 8, 1868.

. . . I shan't think of the poem till next spring, for that is the time when birds pair and sing, and poets *prepare* and ditto. Man undergoes a shrinkage and goosefleshiness of soul during the fall and winter, and only in spring is the rock smitten. Don't you find that the inner man takes that occasion to flap its



wings, and mount all the highest rail-fences of the moral world, and do up a year's crowing?

You mention a "librarian" idea. That would have many temptations for me. Often I think I am better fitted to deal with books than with men. Perhaps I should do well to fit myself, as you say, and try for a position. Yet I have got the school-iron in the fire now, and must wait till 't is thoroughly tried. My school is only a country school, and I suppose, to answer your question as you meant it, we are to only "exist" there, for a while. We are to board in the village, however, and shall have some little society. *Wadsworth* is the place, and Medina County is the County. Near here . . .

Then there fell a blow from which Sill did not recover for many a year — the illness and death of his *alter ego*, Shearer, forecasted in the letter from Palmer to which Sill refers: —

WADSWORTH, OHIO, Feb. 7, 1869.

DEAR H —, — I enclose a letter from California which will tell you its sad news better than I can. Palmer is one of my and Sex's first and best friends there. Lives at Oakland. Do not let any one know about it who will be in danger of writing dolorously to Sex, or letting him know what we hear from



friends there. You will see to that, though, a little thing might save or kill him now. We must all write jolly letters and often. I should go out to him at once if I had means, for it almost seems as if a companion, the right one, might save him, for he is still able to ride and be diverted. There is no one there who will take him and do what ought to be done. I believe it could be done. It is the mind that has been killing him, not the climate.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

There was evidently a plan for Sill to go out to California and look after Shearer: in fact Sill all but suggested it in the last letter, but it was plainly enough not practicable. Between the lines one reads the fine loyal comradeship that united this group of college friends: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Feb. 21, 1869.

DEAR H——, — Your three letters, two to Cuyahoga Falls and one to Wadsworth, were received. . . . As it is there is nothing for it but to renounce. Perhaps I could not do much if I were there, but it seems as though it might be won yet. It is easy enough for a man to look death in the face for himself, but for another, and such a one, it's awful to me. And

the idea of a few thousand miles seems nothing and paltry for such a stake, — only, can it be done? And if the answer is *no*, what help for it? A man may curse or groan according to his temperament — neither wisely, I presume.

So I shall not go, but shall go about my own business just as if all were well. And the outlook is that I shall not very long survive him, only the difference is he would have done something and I never should have. I am pretty much played out with debating this thing.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

The teaching succeeded: he is now in charge of the town schools, and can re-read old books!

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, Aug. 29, '69.

I have been meaning to write to you tomorrow for ever so long. I have been very busy and bothered or 't would have got done. I am just settled in winter quarters. We have moved to our new boarding-place, rooms at the hotel, and this is the first day I have really been at home since I saw you.

I am going to stay here and take the High School, superintending the other schools; and I have been bustling about getting ready for my work. It will be a pretty hard place, but

what of that? As Sex always used to write me about his own unpleasantnesses, "Quid refert, Caio?" We have got two very nice little rooms, southside with sunshine to order, trees contiguous, quiet, and fixed up very pleasantly. . . .

I have, several times over, been into "Wonderland" with Miss Alice. We have found it, as you said, the very delightfulest book that ever was. He that did it is a genius and a wonder himself. The Cheshire Cat, and the Flamingo neck that would n't do for croquet mallet, the March Hare, and the way the animals snubbed and contradicted and confused Alice — I never read anything that pleased me so much. I think the Mad Tea-Party is the best chapter — and for single incidents I believe I award the palm to the Cheshire Cat coming back to ask if she said Pig or Fig, and consenting readily to vanish by degrees, leaving the grin to the last! The March Hare is the gem of the pictures, too, with the King Lear touch about his strawy head, and the glare of his eye as he crowds the miserable dormouse into the teapot. Oh, what a mad book it is! . . .

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Sept., 1869.

I have commenced my school, been running a week. "Central High School." 120 scholars: 2 lady assistants. Latin, Greek,

astronomy, music, philosophy, physical geography, chemistry, etc., tapering down to infantry, under the assistants fresh from the swaddling clothes of the intermediate and primary schools. I am "superintendent of schools," so my cares are many, as there are four primaries besides my own big school. So *that's* "what I am going to do next." . . .

If —, or any other very near-sighted scum-skimmer, gives me any dabs that are good for anything to me, send me a copy, please. But otherwise, abuse is a mere nurse of unprofitable egotism. I don't mean to care whether any one thinks I can write well or ill, so long as I can teach a good school. . . .

I am very busy, as I said. Plenty of time to have *thoughts* of my friends, as you know in your own case.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Nov. 7, '69.

. . . I am tugging away at my school, and think I did well enough in staying here; though the work is almost too much for me. I can see enough, every day, for about three like me to do. Very likely a larger pattern than me might get through the whole of it, but I have to leave lots of things undone. I will enclose one of our blank reports, to show you how we have to be school and college in one; for but few of our 120 scholars can be got into college, ever, and

so must be fed all their little stomachs can possibly digest, here and now.

In one sense a man is an empty windbag who pretends to teach all manner of things without any thorough or even decent preparation; yet it is better, is n't it? that they should get some little inkling of how much there is to be learned, than turned off on a light lunch of arithmetic and orthography.

Winter has come, and I don't scruple to shake my puny fist in his hoary face and call him bad names. My voice is still for spring. . . .

The grumbling of these months is of a healthy tone — that of a man who has so much to do that the time fails him.

Dec., '69.

More to do every day and night than I can find minutes and spinal column for. Comfortably off enough except for a thousand subjects to investigate and questions to be settled and no hour for them. I am forced to be occupied with details . . . yet chafed at the unsettled state of these confounded general principles.

. . . Well, I suppose 't is a good deal illusion, these fine ideas of what we'd do if something was n't just as it is. Blessed is he that wants things to be as he has 'em. But where is the man?



The work in Ohio was absorbing, but hardly satisfying. Soon there came a call from California — from the high school at Oakland where Sill had left warm friends from his earlier visit: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO,  
Jan. 23, 1870.

DEAR CHIEF, — I am very glad to have you writing to me again about the Oakland matter, chiefly because it continues to let me know that you would like to have me come back there among you. I am queer, I'm afraid, about my way of looking (or not looking) at future plans. Whether it springs most from faith, or a Mussulman sort of "fatality" despair of individual planning and trying, I let the future alone more than most seem to: perhaps too much. Except as it affects the convenience of others who may hinge more or less on our edges, I don't see much advantage in taking thought far ahead, especially as to details.

I would like to have a window opened through which I might get a draft of fresh communion with the lives of you folks there. . . . Strange that on such a great planet, alive with us, our thoughts and loves and sympathies should just cluster a half-dozen here and a half-dozen there, and count all the "world," so far as we care, on our fingers.

I suppose we are reading the same telegraphic news, every day, and hearing the same topics talked, and the wives are playing the identical pieces on the pretty-much-identical pianos (only ours is out of tune at present) and so on. . . .

With the return of summer and its comparative leisure, we find our poet again communing with himself:—

June, 1870.

Once in a while there seems to come a sort of eddy in the rush of my thoughts about my school, which leaves me to think of things in general, the future, etc. Such an one appears to have come this Sunday morning, perhaps in compensation for a night full of feverish dreams about classes and plans for scholars. And my eyes turn, first thing, of course, out your way; and the question is, can I manage it to come there? . . .

I wish, if you get time to write me “so large a letter with your own hand” as I hope, you would put in a word or two on your religious status nowadays. We have both been thinking, reading, etc., since a word has been said. For my part I long to “fall in” with somebody. This picket duty is monotonous. I hanker after a shoulder on this side and the other. I can’t agree in belief (or expressed belief — Lord

knows what the villains really think, at home) with the "Christian" people, nor in spirit with the Radicals, etc. . . . Many, here and there, must be living the right way, doing their best, hearty souls, and I'd like to go 'round the world for the next year and take tea with them in succession. Would n't you?

This chapter, in which Sill finds himself and actually takes up his livelihood, may be very appropriately closed with a fragment wherein he chews the cud of bitter and sweet reflection and comes to a wholly false conclusion: —

Dec., 1870.

If I were to commence any prose, for sample, I believe I would take up and recount the things that befell a man who had been so unfortunate as to inspire his friends, early in life, with great expectations of him. What woes it caused him and them, when they repeatedly touched him off as a rocket, and he infallibly came down like a stick. I suppose that if taken young and trained right I might have made a writer; but the training has certainly been wanting. I have got myself, by dint of nearly killing labor, into the shape of an almost tolerable schoolmaster, but higher than that I never shall get, till the resurrection.

## VI

### TEACHING IN CALIFORNIA

THE second sojourn in California, covering the twelve years from 1871 to 1883, formed the largest block in the structure of Sill's life. The invitation foreshadowed in the letter from Mr. Palmer came, and was accepted, and in 1871 Sill began his work as teacher of English in the high school at Oakland, across the bay from San Francisco. There he taught until 1874, when he accepted the chair of English in the University of California at Berkeley, a neighboring suburb of San Francisco.

Sill was chosen Professor of English at the young university — then being set on its feet by Daniel C. Gilman, who was drawn away not long thereafter to organize Johns Hopkins, — and so had the rare distinction of laying the foundations of two American universities both of which have already grown great. The acquaintance between Sill and Gilman grew into a friendship which lasted until Sill's untimely death.

The three years at Oakland were crowded with work — the absorbing, consuming work which teaching becomes to the enthusiast like

Sill. So he wrote little poetry and few letters, and these chiefly about problems connected with his teaching. Such is one to his classmate Williams at New Haven: —

OAKLAND, CAL., Oct. 18, 1871.

Is there any tendency shown in Yale to lessen the amount of Greek required for admission, or any talk of teaching that language, in connection with comparative philology (or some hints at it) by lectures to juniors and seniors?

There is a growing idea out here that such a change should be made. I don't like to leave off my Greek (I have learned it, since leaving college, and taught it), but I've a suspicion that the reformers are right in claiming that more might be done at it by the right sort of lectures than by the excessive cramming of the raw material of Greek culture as at present.

I think the university here would change, if it got any aid and comfort from the Eastern sisters. Will it get it? If not, I must make our high school more Greekish, in the teeth of its principal and public opinion. Latin they take pretty easily, but are restive under Bouheva or Avw ("Woman's Greek, without the accents").

The question is, would n't it have been better for you and me to have had German and



French before College, than lectures on Greek culture, etc., with general language, during college? . . .

The return to California meant a renewal of old friendships and a revival of his old love for that marvellous country which counts him among its prophets. Glimpses of it run through his poems, early and late. He had sung it in his poem, always a favorite with Californians, "Man the Spirit," written in 1865: —

"In this fair land, whose fields lie robed in bloom,  
A living poem bound in blue and gold;  
With azure flowers like little specks of sky  
Fallen, tangled in the dew-drops, to the grass,  
And orange ones — as if the wealth below  
Had blossomed up in beaten flakes of gold."

And again in "The Hermitage": —

"The land where summers never cease  
Their sunny psalm of light and peace;  
Whose moonlight, poured for years untold,  
Has drifted down in dust of gold:  
Whose morning splendors, fallen in showers,  
Leave ceaseless sunrise in the flowers."

Oakland, where now he went to live, and the bay drew his tribute again and again: —

"Beyond, long curves of little shallow waves  
Creep, tremulous with ripples, to the shore  
Till the whole bay seems slowly sliding in,  
With edge of snow that melts against the sand."

The almost constant bloom and incredible

profusion of flowers stirred his fancy. In "April in Oakland" he writes: —

"Was there last night a snow-storm  
So thick the orchards stand  
With drift on drift of blossom-flakes  
Whitening all the land."

And in "The Hermitage": —

"An April, fairer than the Atlantic June,  
Whose calendar of perfect days was kept  
By daily blossoming of some new flower."

An impression naturally deepened by a return to Eastern winter: —

"Ah, give me back the clime I know,  
Where all the year geraniums blow,  
And hyacinth buds bloom white for snow."

Sill's three years at Oakland in the high school were years of intense toil — a sort of sacrificial service as if he would spend himself upon this task of teaching leaving no sinew unstrained.

His reward was as much in the moral as in the intellectual quickening he communicated to his students. One of his students, Miss Millicent Shinn, has left a record of the effect of his teaching; and that this was no isolated case, the outpouring of similar testimony at the Memorial Meeting in 1887 abundantly showed: —

"It was as if he had carried into the school-room the same ideals that would have taken



EDWARD R. SILL, 1872



him into the pulpit. He was full of it, — at every turn in the day's work he referred everything to ideal standards, — duty, and eternity, and man's chief end. It was like having a very religious person teaching children, except that having no stable religious creed, he gave to all he said of ideal aims the spontaneity and ardor of original feelings, experiences wrought out on his own lines. A negligent lesson was apt to be rebuked with reminders (evidently fully felt) that we were forming our characters, and perhaps for more than this life: 'You are working out your eternal destinies now,' he would say. He filled the schoolroom with the ardor and poetic elevation of the idea of Duty as in Wordsworth's ode, — and his rigid applications of it made it no mere poetry to us, either, but a 'stern daughter of the Voice of God,' too.

"He was fond of bringing any great idea, all his own chief topics of spiritual meditation, to the schoolroom. The object of human existence, the *summum bonum*, the chief end of man, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, the service of humanity, the ideals of mediæval chivalry, of Hale's Ten Times One, were everyday subjects to us."

From Miss Shinn also I have these jottings on Sill's personal relations with his students: "He was in the habit of having little talks with



pupils, — at recess, or at odd minutes in school; and often asked them to come to his house for this or that, — to get a book, try a piece of music with Mrs. Sill, etc.; and most of them thought, when they found a new flower or bug, or a striking passage in a book, that they must needs take it to show him. He concerned himself about our outside affairs, — music-lessons, eye-strain, etc. Yet he was not the sort of teacher who goes out and plays with the boys, helps in the organization of clubs, etc. He always, with all his easy freedom of manner, kept a distance, and an authority. He encouraged us to talk freely, to argue back and criticise, and would take more of that than any teacher I ever knew; but he drew strict lines, and never permitted an impertinence, never laughed with the boys good-naturedly in a joke against himself (which, indeed, they scarcely ventured upon); and in any real case of discipline, his voice was always for severity. He was not ordinarily sarcastic in the schoolroom; but either pert smartness or deliberate neglect of a duty would bring a crushing contempt into his manner and speech sometimes, — more his manner than his speech, for I do not recall especially sharp things that he said. He would not sit and labor through an ill-learned lesson; he would throw down the book contemptuously and refuse to hear it. He explained much less

than teachers I see nowadays, and expected us to dig out most of our difficulties for ourselves. For dishonesty he had no mercy, but that was practically unknown in the school in his day."

"Once," Miss Shinn adds, "he and Mrs. Sill took me with them to hear Booth and McCullough in 'Lear' — my first play: and after it was over Mr. Sill asked me if I wanted to cry anywhere: I said I did very much when Lear recognized Cordelia. He said, 'That was the place where I had to look away and begin studying my neighbors' behavior very hard.'"

In a letter of Professor Royce, who was Sill's assistant in the Department of English at the University, there is a bit of reminiscence which illustrates the spirit Sill brought to his teaching: —

"Once I found him very gloomy. His work at Berkeley was wearing him out, and certain of his worst pupils, to whose interests he had been showing his usual unsparing devotion, had just been paining him by bitter speeches and cruel misunderstandings. I gossiped on about the affair to him, in an irresponsible way, of course, until among other things I said: 'You see, Sill, all this comes from your determined fashion of casting pearls before swine. Why will you always do it?' 'Ah, Royce,' he responded, with a perfectly simple and calm veracity in his gentle voice, 'you never know

in this world whether you were really casting pearls at all until you feel the tusks.'”

But no better expression of Sill's ideal in teaching can, I fancy, be found than the unpublished notes of a talk to his high school class shortly before leaving Oakland to take the post at the university. It came to me in pencil, having been found after his death among his papers, probably preserved as a memento: —

“I cannot feel that this is a common time. Either because of the direction my own thoughts and feelings have lately taken, in attempting to guide yours, or the thoughts I have had about each one of you, or the thoughts you yourselves have expressed, or a something which I have seen shadowed forth on your faces, or glimmering in your eyes from time to time lately — this or something else has filled me with the sense of an unusual potency and import in this particular point of your lives. When I look at you, it is as if I looked out on the dim, misty spaces of the dawn of a new creation, and as if I saw vague shapes of unknown possibilities forming and dissolving and re-forming before me, and as if as of old the spirit of God were moving on the face of the waters. The air seems astir with prophetic intimations. It is as if I heard the voices of awakening souls questioning the universe in which they have just awakened, questioning

themselves, turning from their past with contempt, or sorrow, or anger, or ridicule, or pity — turning to their future with hope, or wonder, or growing purpose.

“It may be only my imagination: but it seems to me the whole air is electrical with it lately — with this casting-off of old chrysalis husks, and the awakening rhythm of spiritual wings.

“Let us consider for a little, what it is we are doing, or what we may do, if we will.

“There are three most momentous events that come in most people’s lives: the birth into this mystery of life, out of that other preceding mystery, of which we have not even a gleam: the birth out of this life, into whatever mystery is to come: and between them, at some point, that time — that day — that morning or that mid-day — or evening — when the soul makes its one final irrevocable choice of what its life and what itself shall be.

“I do not think one always knows, at the time, what is being decided, or what has been decided. It may come casually, in some quiet moment of watching a cloud, or a bird, or a star — it may come after a strong logical wrestling between duty and desire — it may come slowly, day after day, as the good green grass in spring, or it may come like a thunder-flash out of a passionate storm of tears and



prayer — but come it will, to most of us. Before it, our days are aimless, useless, unsatisfactory, if not worse — after it, we have a motive for what we do, and a satisfaction in what is done. Before it, the soul's flight is only the haphazard fluttering of an insect, — afterward, it is the swift, sure flight of the bird, that seeks its own tree-top and sings upon its way.

“Most men have no ruling purpose. It may be so with some of you, but with some I know it is not true. Individually, in your own secret souls, I believe you have made choices that if carried out will blossom and bear fruit in good lives. But it is not quite enough that this is true of us separately and secretly: I wish we might in some way be more than a group of separate, self-contained individuals in this. I cannot ask you to talk much about this, in any personal way. There is an instinctive delicacy that forbids it. But I wish that by some sudden revelation of each self to each other, each might know that every one of us was from this time forth devoted to a high ideal. I do not believe much in vows, or excited avowals — but I wish that in some sudden flash of insight, some answering eye-glance of mutual understanding, each might say in his heart — ‘Here are others, who, like me, are disgusted and ashamed with what they have been, have done, have left undone, and who,



like me, are steadying themselves among the strong waves of circumstance, like ships in a pent sea, and steering their course by the same stars that I, too, look up to.' And we all belong to a larger company of other times and places. Many have striven to attain ideals; they are of many different ages and climes. The company of the heroic souls of history are the real Round Table, and their king is that blameless man to whose law of love they have all, in one way or another, been loyal. And that Round Table, why may we not all join?

"The old world goes on, day after day; with much mixture of toil and suffering and injustice and foolishness in it. Life in it does n't seem a very great or valuable affair. No wonder so many throw it away, not caring to live out even the few winters and summers that might be allotted to them. But it often seems to me it might be such a glorious old world if some of us would conspire together to make it so. What a beautiful earth it is! What splendor in the mornings of it — the sunrises, the clearings away after rain, the moonrises, the superb distances, the hill colors, the elastic spring of muscular strength, the power of thinking, of remembering, the confidence we can put in each other, the help and services we can render each other, the love we can give, and get. — It seems a splendid earth to live on. If only we

always lived up to the level of our best moments!

“How are we to do this? I have no revelation to give, no secret wisdom, in answer to this. I can only give expression, as one of you, to the question. But there are some things I feel sure would help us, and one is, let us get help from other lives. We can find out how others have lived, and what they have tried to do, and how they have succeeded. These people of whom we read in books have been, after all, just like us. The wiser people get, the more they say they discover how much they are like every one else. The child thinks nobody ever was like him — he looks out on other people, and especially on people of past times, as being a different sort of creatures. Nobody ever had just his feelings, or just his expectations. By and by he discovers that each child of them all has had just that thought about the rest. It is likely that such a person as Abraham Lincoln, for instance, or Mrs. Browning, or Socrates, had at one time or another every single thought and every single mood and feeling, that you have had. It is probable that you have never had an emotion, a desire, a temptation, a wish, which has not been in each other mind here. How else could we understand each other? Let us draw what inspiration we can, then, from the man and woman — the immortal girls

and boys, that have trodden these earth-ways before us. When you look at Sirius, or the Pleiades, or the Great Dipper to-night, try to think how those other souls have age after age looked up at those same twinkling lights, and had the same thought, or the same question, or the same vacancy, in their human heart as they looked with just such eyes, and turned away with just such footsteps as yours.

“And one more suggestion; if we are so much alike, let us help each other. Don’t let us be ashamed of what is best in us. Let us not any longer pretend we are superficial and shallow all the time. If we have feelings and thoughts on other subjects than the trifles we generally chat about, let us frankly speak them out. The wisest and profoundest people, when we come to learn about them, seem to talk most freely about beauty, and truth, and love, and earnest things. It is only children and childish people who are afraid or ashamed to be themselves. The telegraph brought us yesterday the last conversation that Sumner had with the eminent men, lawyers and statesmen and judges, that were with him; and one of the last things he said was, ‘Tell Emerson that I love and revere him.’

“Which of you would feel free to write the same of anybody or anything and read it here? Yet what is it but a childish falling-in with

shallow custom of shallow people that should prevent.

“Am I mistaken, or has not the time come when we are talking to ourselves, and do not care either if we say it aloud, — saying: ‘Soul of mine, you have not been all that you might. You have neither done for yourself, nor for others, what you might yet do, if you would. You have kept your best feelings hidden. You have like a coward showed of yourself only what others were showing of themselves and done only what others expected of you. You have been cowardly, and foolish, and worthless and conceited. Rise up, and from this hour live out your true self, modestly, courageously — and let this base, timid, indolent, selfish body in which you live, be not your master, but your loyal servant for all noble ends.’

“Some such thing as this I believe every one of these greater souls of whom we read must have thought, at some such hour as this. There must have been in the lives of Socrates and Lincoln and Washington, probably in their boyhood, a decisive hour, when from that time on they might have been only common creatures. But the heroic soul rose in them equal to the hour, and their lives became immortal types of goodness and greatness.

“I suggest to you as the best motive I can find: a life for the service of others. I offer you



the motto which a Saxon knight of old time used to bear on his shield, 'Ich Dien' — I serve."

The talk, which was given in classroom, called forth various responses in letters and compositions and to at least one of them Sill wrote a reply: —

OAKLAND, March 23, '74.

MONDAY NOON.

DEAR MILLIE, — Then, too, if we should decide on service as the principal thing, the question arises: of what sort? Shall it be like the washing of the feet, or the dying on the cross? That is, — the small common helpfulnesses and services chiefly, or some special great absorbing service. Shall we let our lives run along in apparent insignificance, in channels others dig for them, — mere irrigating trenches, — or cut their own channels, under guidance of some idea of our own — great if possible, good certainly, and at least our own. . . . Somebody wrote to me, "Why don't you stop trying to make something of other people, and make something of yourself?" Which will *you* do? They are hardly compatible. Supposing the same amount of good to others from either way, is there not an additional grain of good in the greater abnegation of self involved in the washing the feet theory?

May one not look at it in this way: to be all



we might includes "character" as perhaps its highest part (considered in the light of immortality, as security for gains of all sorts in the future: as basis therefor, and essential condition: certainly the highest part): now it is so necessary to the highest character to serve others: to bear one's cross, as well as to be lifted up on it: to renounce, for others' sake: that the gain is always more than the loss, even if we gave up ten years of study and thought to tend some bed-ridden cripple, whose highest want seemed only a cool cup of water now and then.

Well, one thing is certain: we can seek the highest and best and truest we know: under guidance of half a dozen good motives: no matter if they be inextricably mixed; and no irreparable loss if even some bad ones insist on mixing in with them.

Is it certain that the reason is in all ways higher than the emotions? Perhaps they cannot be compared wisely: any more than a yard and a color. Love seems to me a pretty high thing. I suspect that to say a certain motive is based on *love*, is not saying it is any lower than one based on logic.

As Mr. — says, one would n't like to have to choose whether he would prefer to have the oxygen or the nitrogen taken out of his atmosphere.

We get a prejudice against the emotions, when we see them acting regardless of reason; and against calculation, when it is cold and emotionless. How if they both go streaming in one current, like the light and the air?

I like it that there are some subjects on which, when one has said anything, he has after all said nothing at all.

The Oakland period can perhaps hardly be better closed than by another reminiscence of Miss Shinn to whom the record of those years owes so much: —

“When I was a schoolgirl, my mother was speaking somewhat anxiously of the care needed in environing young people; and Mr. Sill said, ‘Well, I suppose so; yet I often think that a young soul, if it is only a truthful soul, might safely enough be tossed off anywhere in the universe, — sent off at a tangent into space, — and will come out all right.’ — ‘I should want to know what a young soul was going to come into contact with, before I sent it spinning off that way, if it was any one dear to me,’ said my mother, a little concerned. — ‘Come in contact with God’s good worlds, anyhow,’ said Mr. Sill, dropping the subject by rising to move about, as he often did. I do not know quite how much he meant by the phrase; perhaps only to avoid further pressing of the

point; but it struck me at sixteen as poetic and lofty, and gave me a sort of feeling of safety and intellectual courage."

#### THE UNIVERSITY

Sill began his work as Professor of English in the University of California in 1875, when he was thirty-four, full of ardent enthusiasm and eagerness to teach. It was a moralizing, New England, proselyting zeal that inspired him — akin to that which he had expressed in "Man the Spirit": —

"Here  
Upon a coast whose calmer-blossoming surf  
Beats not with such an iron clang as theirs,  
We plant the Newer England; this our word,  
That man is no mere spider-like machine  
To spin out webs of railroads after him  
In all earth's corners, nor a crafty brain  
Made to knit cunning nets of politics  
Or sharpen down to insignificance  
On the grinding wheels of business, but a Soul,  
That travelling higher worlds in upper light  
Dips down through bodily contact into this."

Need enough there was of it; for California was "practical," materialistic, Philistine. Sill did what he could to stem the tide, and while he was at the university, letters never lacked a champion nor the life of the spirit an exponent. Some there will be to regret that he did not give himself wholly to letters, leaving pedagogy

to others. He was, of course, first and last a man of letters, and say as loud and often as he liked that he was "only a school teacher who occasionally wrote verses," he probably knew in his moments of insight that the pen was his true weapon and the written word his deed. So long as he was teaching, however, he gave himself manfully to his teaching, writing but little poetry and very few letters except to students either in tutelage or out of the academic nest and themselves grappling with the teacher's task.

The letters and fragments of letters which follow are taken from the "Memorial Volume" issued in California in 1887, the originals no longer obtainable and the very names of the recipients unknown for the most part. Full of preaching they are. "We plant the Newer England!"

"I hope you are not trying to do any brain-work. Let your brains vegetate and make new growth undisturbed, for next term! — there's so much I shall ask you to do. Mind you, I know about brains. The thing you want now till term opens is absolute stupidity, and great activity in the digestive apparatus. Horrid, is n't it! Item, so much carbon; item, so much nitrogen: 'five forms of protoplasm': muscular exercise to distribute them well about the tissues. Then, next term, we will enter upon our

birthright as 'heirs of all the ages' and the 'long result of time.'"

"Your question of 26th May was too good a one to leave so long unanswered. It was not left as being too *hard* to answer, but I have been very busy, and really could not find time to settle myself to say anything on so important a question till to-night, and now it must be a brief note. The real value of 'being well read' seems to me to be in the wider and truer life it gives us. By 'wider' I mean that our thoughts and feelings and purposes are more complex and more consonant with the complexity and manifoldness of the universe we live in: the microcosm gets a little — even if a very little — nearer in quality and quantity to the macrocosm. The crystal leads such a narrow life — just along one little line — a single law of facet and angle: the plant a little wider: the fish a little wider: and the different sorts of *people* widening and widening out in their inner activities — and much according to their *reading* (since living, human contact is not possible, except with the few relatives and neighbors).

"And by *truer* life, I mean truer to nature: more as we were meant to be: the inner relations, between *ideas*, corresponding closer to the other relations — or 'real' relations — between *things*. These real thing-relations are in



fact very complex and vastly inclusive: so must the thoughts and feelings be, if 'true,' or truly correspondent or mirror-like to them.

"I don't see that culture (unless you spell it wrong) needs — or tends at all — to cut one off from human warmth. Are not some of the 'best-read' people you know or hear of, some of the broadest-hearted also? The very essence of culture is shaking off the nightmare of self-consciousness and self-absorption and attaining a sort of Christian Nirvana — lost in the great whole of humanity: thinking of others, caring for others, admiring and loving others.

"I should like to have you write me more fully about it sometime."

"If you have a shadow of suspicion that your own manner . . . may be at fault (or at misfortune), pray endeavor to change it. We must accommodate ourselves to the imperfect natures of people, just as they have to to ours. No man can be just his natural, unrestrained self, without impinging too much. Angles collide with angles. 'Suspect yourself' is a great aid towards getting along with people. It's the littleness of our natures that lets us stand on our rights so much as we constantly do. I suppose the great men stood chiefly on their duties, instead. *Et ego* have been knocked and rubbed a good deal; but in the retrospect it seems to

have been mainly my own fault or unwisdom. Jesus would have 'got along' pretty smoothly with nearly everybody. Even the whip in the temple is said to have been for the cattle, not their sellers.

"Of course charity is not to blind our judgment; but only to enlighten it. *Exempli gratia*, I have some little charity for the present Legislature. Nevertheless, my judgment is that they are largely knaves and fools. Still, at this distance, I can recognize some of them as fellow-critters. But what a mess they are making of educational matters. . . .

"If you ever get thinking too much about yourself, and your own concerns, read 'King Lear,' or 'As You Like It,' or 'Hamlet': — taking the whole play at a sitting or two.

"It is a great pity that in making plans, etc., one has to think so much *about* one's self. Beware, my dear child, of too much — or too exclusive — interest in yourself, and your own inner experiences. Make sensible plans for yourself, and then go at their fulfilment, forgetting yourself (one can, since all plans are for work of some kind, and that may all be from within outward. Even reading and study and thought and writing — are so). Have you read Spencer's 'Ethics'? Better do so. (Did you read Emerson on the 'Sovereignty of Ethics' in 'North American Review,' May, '77?) Spencer

has a very sharp passage on Carlyle, but who has expressed the protest against egoism so well — so ‘very salt and bitter and good’ — as he in the second part of ‘Sartor Resartus’ (that part — the autobiographical part — though he pretends it is not auto — is worth reading over, even if you have n’t lately.)”

“Here are a few points of advice from a veteran, which I wish you not only to read, but to solemnly adhere to: —

“1. Don’t *care* in the faintest possible degree what the children *think* of your doings. (You may *think* as much as you please of what they *care* for. They have tender little hearts.)

“2. Don’t try to do (or have them) two days’ work in one. Little by little, and the least things first, and *many times repeated*.

“3. Their education consists mainly in *their working: not yours*. Sometimes the teachers that work hardest do the poorest work, on that very account. (Your work *out* of school, of course, helps them: but I mean, in.)

“4. If you find yourself getting excited, or talking loud, or moving quickly (i.e., hurriedly) just *stop*, and let the steam go down. Give the children something to do quietly, as a composition on ‘What I should like to have,’ or something, meantime.

“5. Go to bed early, after giving yourself a

rubbing, to get the blood out of your brain into your skin and muscles.

“6. Keep warm: every minute, day and night. Be sure you are clothed warmly enough for that climate, especially when winter comes.

“7, 8, 9, and 10. Never allow yourself to think of what you have been doing; during the day, for instance. It is the going over things in the head afterwards, that kills. Throw your mind off from a thing, when it is done, and look only forward, planning the next thing. All night, for example, think about the next day’s work, not the past one. *This rule is worth everything.*

“You will feel queer, perhaps, for a day or two or three, but will soon like it and enjoy yourself.”

“Truly it would be pleasanter for you to be teaching with me . . . but perhaps not so good for you after all. That which teaches us most, is the best for us. I often wish, myself, that I were in some ‘loveliest village of the vale,’ with an old wooden schoolhouse and a parcel of bare-foot urchins; with a little stream to fish in, and a long meadow to see sunsets from, and a little old church where I might hear a country choir and doze o’ summer afternoons. But better not. And so with you. . . .

“It is good, also, to be alone for a while.



That's the bitterest medicine one ever has to take, but we need it. So peg away at the small duties of these days. A good many of us have had very similar experiences, translated into different languages of circumstances and particular individuals, but the same in purport. . . .

"Don't let any more of the molehills seem mountains than you can help. 'Who cares?' is a good nightcap.

"Think how dreadful it must be to *be* such people as we wot of. What is anything they can do to others, compared with *that* ?"

"Your letter of 20th was received yesterday, on my return from a horseback ride with Mr. McLean, up through Napa and Sonoma. I sent you a paper from Napa, by the way . . . it contains a couple of spirited pictures. Don't you like those frogs, with the moonshine on their slippery legs? and the walrus picture is good. I think I should quietly substitute any such for the villainous ones which may be among those you speak of on the walls. I used to put up newspaper pictures on my school-house walls, for lack of finer ones. Children absorb so much through the eye. . . .

"You are right about the geography class. Give them all the physical, I should say together. Skip much of the other geography,



having them learn only the principal things, and those with great thoroughness. Outline map recitations: pointing to rivers, great cities, etc., and stimulating them (a large class of mixed grades can do it) to *quick* accurate answers — the best thing. . . . Get the class to take an imaginary voyage with you down a river, or along a coast, or so forth (in a balloon over a country, say). Then each in turn describes what they see. Play we have come to such and such a town: what costumes; ‘exports’; trees and plants; climate, etc. . . .

“You will get along very well, I think, with your little flock. Your big boys won’t trouble you much. If either of them should, be firm as a rock. He must do as you say, or leave. You must remember that you are not only hired by that *deestrick*, but by the State of California. . . . You have the Governor and Supreme Court and Legislature at your back for support, provided you do just right. . . . But I’ve no idea they will offend. They are coarse enough, no doubt; but a good deal of it is superficial. At heart they have good about them. Every one had a mother. Half of these students are just as bad, under the surface. You or I are bad enough, if it comes to that. We must n’t be squeamish: physicians (moral and mental, as well as physical) have to stand some things that are offensive. You must take

things right by the horns. Don't allow anything bad for fear of speaking of it. Take your sinners one by one, however. Never chide in public, if you can help it. . . . See the good in your children, all you can."

"I am very glad you have the lovely things to look at, in sky and mountain. We could hardly get on otherwise. With those, and a few human beings whom we believe in and trust, and these both as prophetic intimations of something beyond, higher than either — we can do very well — even if they fry the steak, and the grammar class seems *panta konis*, *panta ouden*.

"I wish I could help you in some way. I can only send my sympathy, and urge you to do all you can for the children, regardless of their defects of breeding, the disagreeableness of their parentage, etc. . . . If you can help one or two of them ever so little: or even make them happier — the cup of cold water, you know: there is a good deal in that."

"You should be writing a good deal, in odd moments. Send me anything that's good — after it gets cold: — so that you need n't feel that it's *going* to be sent while writing; for what we all need is to keep clear of restraining influences — these obscure, subtle ones, that

throw us out of *rapport* with ourselves, and make us think of the writing instead of the thing to be written. I believe we could all of us write something worth while if we could get free from everything but the looking clearly at the inner thing we are trying (or should be) to transcribe."

"If your brain wheels run on . . . give them some good important grist to grind: as, a new book — or a bit of natural science (natural science is a good healthy inanity to relieve the brain with, any time), or some French (e.g., 'Katia,' a Russian story, by Tolstoy, translated into French). Take this rule for yourself: — THINK OF THE LARGEST THINGS (among all that come through your brain, hour by hour) and those that have the least reference to yourself. You'd much better be thinking about the explorations in Assyria, and *act* in your personal affairs from momentary common sense and instinct, than to neglect all these world-interests and be planning, be reminiscing about some small personal relation or piece of conduct." A personal glimpse from Miss Shinn's diary supplements these scraps of letters.

"Mrs. Sill got her little dog, Twinkle, that afternoon, — I do not remember whence, — a spaniel puppy; she called him Twinkle later,

because the white spot at the end of his tail twinkled so. She called to Mr. Sill to come and see him as soon as he got home, and I heard him say, 'Where's Millie? Has she seen him?' They were both much taken up with the puppy, and she said that if Ben ate up her little dog, Mr. Sill would have to dispose of Ben. The three of us played with or held him most of the evening; and then Mr. Sill spent a long time over him, putting him to bed; the puppy would cry when left alone, and Mr. Sill would come back and fuss over him; at last he got a hot-water bag, and put it just under the straw in the box, and the puppy snuggled down to it and stopped crying at once. Mr. Sill came and told me that we 'had a good joke on that little dog; he thought it was his mother.' Then he took his wife outdoors to look at the stars, and by and by came and asked me if I knew what time it was, and told me it was a quarter before eleven. I urged that I had not finished my work, saying that I found the Epistles slower reading than the Odes. He said the Epistles were interesting, however. Then I called his attention to a large and uncanny insect which had settled on my wall, above the door; he stepped inside to look at it, and exclaimed at it. 'I should think you would put him out!' I said I was afraid to. 'You'd rather put him out than have him in, would n't you?' he said; he then went off and



got a brush, saying, 'Who'll put him out? Little Johnny Stout,' knocked the creature out into the dining-room and shut my door, saying, 'Good-night.' But he stayed in the next room some time himself, petting and feeding and talking to the little dog.

"The puppy occupied them off and on much of Sunday; but in the afternoon we took a walk; and as we came back to the house, Mr. Sill said, 'Betty, do you know the people who live here?' — 'I've met them,' she said, 'but I don't think much of them.' — 'The man's a queer sort of fellow,' he said; 'I've met him a few times.' — 'He does n't have much to say to you, does he?' — 'No. — I guess he has n't much to say.' — I think such whimsical speeches as this were with Mr. Sill an expression of that sudden sense of externality to one's self that comes over people of a metaphysical bent at times."

The same friend has jotted down some reminiscential impressions of Sill's personality during that period: —

"When I think of Mr. Sill when he was not depressed or absent-minded, I think of a gentle, pervasive brightness, a quick, humorous appreciation of everything, a light quaintness and original and whimsical turn of speech and behavior, which kept one amused when with him, and kept the atmosphere of his house alluring.



It was like all the other charming traits in his personality, a good deal in the vivid yet subtle response of his voice and manner and face to his mood, — the lighting-up of his eye, the confidential and delightful tone of voice with which he took you into the joke, — something flattering, intimate, whole-hearted, and friendly about it. Certainly, he was never one to 'keep the table in a roar,' to be the centre of a laughing circle, — it would have shut him up promptly.

"If there had been anything nervous or abrupt about his manner, I think Mr. Sill might have been called a restless man in his ways at home. He did not seclude himself in a study and work for hours together; he would get up and go and attend to this or that; he passed to and fro often; would come, perhaps twice or three times in the evening, to ask a question, show a book or picture, go to look at the weather, to see the puppy, etc. He did not sit down for a long talk, but would exchange a few sentences and off again. When smoking with a man friend, or when off on a long walk, there would sometimes be long talks, but rarely under other conditions."

Plainly enough his professional responsibilities failed to repress or pedagogize him; he remained swift, alert, unpredictable always,

and incurably addicted to outdoor vocations and amusements. As long as he was in California he made seasonal jaunts into the mountains; the first dated back to 1863 during his first sojourn on the Pacific slope — an expedition of adventure and discovery which he recorded in a dithyrambic effusion in the Sacramento "Union" beginning, "We have just returned from a three weeks' horseback ride among the mountains." From 1871 to 1882 he usually made these excursions in company with his neighbor and friend the Reverend J. K. McLean, who has left a pleasant record of Sill as fellow camper-out: —

"With equal enthusiasm would he court the sly wood hummingbirds and delightful water-ousels, and coax the lizards; help to fell trees for river foot-logs; gather fir and redwood boughs for bedding, and chop stumps for fuel; take out rattlesnake fangs for microscopic examination, stalk deer, and praise the forest flowers and mountain lilies."

It is to one or another of these jaunts that Sill alludes in two bits of prose: —

"I remember one night when we were camped by the McCloud River, deep in the heart of the redwood forest in northern California. There was no moon. Far above us the great plummy tops of the redwoods, own kin to the giant

trees of the Sierras, rose like cathedral roof and towers, and hid the starlight. The aisles below were empty and silent, and mysterious with that soul of shadow that haunts the solitary woods at night. The aisles were silent, but not the choir. For, a stone's-throw to the right, the voices of the clear, deep river were talking and laughing all night long. They were perfectly human tones. There would run on for a few moments an even, continuous babble; then out of it would rise a mingled peal of musical laughter, like bells, or clear pebbles striking together, or tinkling of ice, yet all the time human. Then there would run merry chucklings up and down the river; and then a shout would arise, away downstream, and another; and then all the hurrying voices would talk loudly together; and then a moment's quiet; and then, again, inextinguishable laughter.

"If I had lain there alone, perhaps I might have understood some fragment of this inarticulate music, or speech. But perhaps, too, I might have paid for it by never hearing mortal accents more; so weirdly this tumult of elfin syllables wrought upon me, even well companioned as I was, there in the dimness and unearthly solitude of the starlit forest.<sup>1</sup>

"Over in the Sierra Nevadas, it is true, I lay

<sup>1</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*, p. 47.

one sunshiny afternoon along a gleaming slope of the primeval granite, and cooled my cheek against its ice-planed polish, and admitted that here at last was something pretty old. Yet 'rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun' as was this gigantic adamantine couch, there was a still older thing playing at that very moment about us. It was the mountain wind. I could put out my hand to it, and reflect that it might have been this very identical breath of air that bubbled up through the sea when the towers of Atlantis went down; or it may have flickered the flame on Abel's altar. 'You need not,' I might have said to it, 'think to palm yourself off as a freakish young zephyr, just born of yonder snow-streak and the sun-warmed rock; you have been roaming this planet ever since its birth. You have whirled in cyclones, and danced with the streamers of the aurora; it was you that breathed Job's curses, and the love-vows of the first lover that was ever forsworn.'"<sup>1</sup>

As a teacher Sill was suggestive and inspiring to a degree seldom matched, so that his old students speak of his classroom talks to this day. He was, of course, especially interested in language and its niceties. One of his Latin students writes of his attention to "true ade-

<sup>1</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*, p. 259.



quate renderings in English. He used to say, 'When Virgil wrote this he did not merely choose words that expressed his literal meaning to Roman readers, as if he had been telling his grocer which kind of vegetable he would take: he had also to convey to his reader the atmosphere, the poetic suggestion, the "light that never was on sea or land," which was in his own vision, and which would cling about the well-chosen word in Latin just as much as in English poetry; and you do not render him truly into English unless you reproduce all that.' A happy choice of a word in our Virgil class was a find, over which he openly rejoiced, and the class with him."

And in another place the same writer gives a somewhat austere view of Sill's teaching methods:—

"Comparative philology, derivations, the laws of language, especially the comparative laws, drawn from different languages, interested him greatly, and was one of the things most emphasized. He liked to spear into the psychology of different forms of language expression,—why did the Latin reduplicate the perfect, and why should an auxiliary like 'have' express perfect tense to us? Why should the Greek mind and the modern European mind demand an article, and the Roman mind none? etc. He read chapters of Max Müller



and other philologists to us, and his own zest in the matter made comparative philology seem the most exciting of researches. How he found time for all this, I do not know: we entered college with a preparation as severe as that of to-day, in grammar and translation, and although our course was three years, and they take four now, and have specialized teachers in each subject, they get no time for all these literary and philological divagations, for the careful polishing of translations, the attempts to render in English verse, the construction of models of Cæsar's bridge, — and yet Mr. Sill was quite a martinet in the grammatical accuracy he required. He expected paradigms to be so learned that they were rooted for a lifetime; syntax to be minutely understood; and he had an old-fashioned (and I think perfectly sound) respect for a rule, committed to memory till it was a lifelong possession. He was not in the least a New Education man, and all his variations were played on a conservative theme. Rigid drill, memorizing, repetition, underlay all his work; and we were never allowed to begin to have fun with a subject till we had accomplished the drudgery of it. He did not fear or shirk drudgery for himself, and had no idea of letting us do it."

It is recalled that "he kept photographs of classical statuary in the room . . . and we had

sundry talks about them which . . . gave us an infection of his genuine liking for them." It was probably his recollections of seeking suitable pictures that set him writing years later, when he had laid aside the professional toga: —

"If I were a Professor of Literature, I should desire to hang my lecture-room with pictures, — not of the old traditional and forbidding decrepitudes, but of Milton, for example, as the charming young swordsman, with velvet cloak tossed on the ground and rapier in hand; of Homer, no longer blind and prematurely agonized, as it were, with our modern perplexities in finding him a birthplace, but as the splendid young Greek athlete, limbed and weaponed like his own youthful vision of Apollo, as

"Down he came,  
Down from the summit of the Olympian mount,  
Wrathful in heart; his shoulders bore the bow  
And hollow quiver; there the arrows rang  
Upon the shoulders of the angry god,  
As on he moved. He came as comes the night,  
And, seated from the ships aloof, sent forth  
An arrow; terrible was heard the clang  
Of that resplendent bow.'

"I would tamper with even such venerated traditional dignities as Mrs. Barbauld, for the sake of their own rehabilitation in the eyes of misguided youth. She should no longer frown formidable behind the stately prænomen of

'Letitia'; she should be given back her true girl-name of 'Nancy,' and be represented, after her own account, as lithely and blithely climbing an apple tree. Pythagoras should be a gracious stripling, crowned with ivy buds and stretched at a pretty goat-girl's feet, touching delicately the seven-stringed lyre. Even Moses might be shown as a buxom and frolicsome boy, shying stones at the crocodiles. Only Shakespeare, of all the pantheon, would need no change. His eternal youthfulness has been too much for the text-books and the monument-makers, and we always seem to conceive him as the fresh-hearted and full-forced man he really was."<sup>1</sup>

For the three ensuing years students and classes and the problems of education absorbed him. His letters — few and far between — seldom touch upon anything else. His class-mate, Henry Holt, remains his standby for all needs: —

BERKELEY, May, '77.

DEAR HENRY, — Your package of books for the Students' Library is received. . . . It has excited considerable enthusiasm in the students that one of the great publishers in New York should send such a gift. I think it has had some result on their views of human

<sup>1</sup> *The Prose of Edward Rowland Sill*, p. 251.



HOME OF EDWARD R. SILL, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA





nature, as well at the prospective scholarly result. If you know what my notions of teaching are, you will understand what place books for the student hold in my views of the universe. It is my hobby that the best education you can give a young fellow (if not about the only education) is to bring his mind in real contact with the best other minds. My labor goes in that direction: selecting with (I hope) constantly better discrimination the best things, and the best parts of the best, and contriving new ways to get the boys the power and the desire and the opportunity to assimilate them: to "get outside" of them. . . .

Who would have thought, that night when we were sleepily talking about the future, in bed in your room in New Haven, in 1860, that seventeen years after (what a distance that seemed then!) I was to be hammering at the young brains in these longitudes, and you were to be sending out a lot of steam-power to keep the hammer going. The whirligig brings round lots of things besides revenges.

What a surprise it will be a thousand years hence if we happen to be doing similar things.

The next three letters are addressed to Daniel C. Gilman, who had been President of the University of California when Sill went there, and

was now President of Johns Hopkins. They introduce a new figure, Josiah Royce, who was to become very well known later, and, by the way, to become a very good friend of Sill.

BERKELEY, Nov. 14, '77.

TO DANIEL C. GILMAN: —

MY DEAR SIR, — I may as well say again that I was very much disappointed at not seeing you. I did not call at your house for the reason that I feared you would make the effort to see a caller when you were not really well enough to do so. I trust you are well again by this time: and so ready to be bothered once more with questions; as, item, do you know of any college in good standing that gives the degree of A.B. without Latin and Greek, or without Greek? What colleges give A.M. without Latin or Greek (aside from complimentary degrees)? If I understand aright *you* give A.B. for certain courses which may not include Greek. And why not? if a course is contrived with stuff in it equivalent.

Our new President is about announcing a course in "Science and Letters," which is to be a "liberal education" for business men. I tell him — as about the old "strawberry" — there *might* be made a course, perhaps, — and may perhaps in the future, — which shall give a "liberal education" without Latin; but who

has seen such a one as yet invented, or any certain product thereof?

I for my part am unwilling to have much to do with — or to be responsible at all for — any regular college course, with a degree, which is not worthy, at least, of A.B.: or equivalent thereto. I am willing to lecture to teachers and others on Literature, etc., and do do it; but I don't believe a "college" ought to give a regular four years' curriculum and give a degree at the end of it, unless there is good substantial stuff in it, enough to make a rich and trained mind.

Do you know of any young man who has the making of a professor of English literature in him, and whom I could get next year and maybe sooner for assistant, to teach rhetoric, composition, etc.,

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

BERKELEY, May 6, 1878.

MY DEAR SIR, — I wish you would tell me if you know of just the right man for my assistant here next year. I have some little hope that I may get the Regents to give \$100 a month. Of course nobody could be imported for less than that. In fact I shall try to make them offer \$125. I believe I have succeeded, in spite of the world, the flesh and the Presi-

dent, in creating a demand for English studies in the university, getting a start largely through you. The students want it, and most of the faculty do, in theory, though in practice the Mathematics still ride us like a nightmare. I want a young man for assistant: young, so that he may be receptive and willing to do *my* way rather than some older and worse one (if he have any better one, *I* hope to be receptive): he should have a genuine love of literature and quickness to comprehend it (I don't care so much for wide attainment in it as for the gift of appreciation of literature and discrimination as to it): he should know a good deal about the English language (and to know about that he must be a good mental philosopher — more important even than the philology) and the Latin and Greek, and, if possible, German. Finally, he should be a good writer and speaker (both of these in the natural, i.e., modern style) and so the cause of it in others.

If you can point me to such a man, I will be very thankful. And if he be, in addition to these foregoing graces and perfections, a man with a bit of æsthetics about his brains somewhere, I will verily use all the eloquence I have or can borrow to get him \$150 a month.

I can't get over the conviction, in truth I get more and more under it, that the best

thing "education" can do for a boy — next to bringing him into communication with his living fellows, both students and teachers — is the getting him into full communication with the best that is in literature. I feel as if I wanted to set twenty men at work on these students here, helping me to do it, or letting me help them.

I am obliged to you for an occasional paper and so forth; I am always glad to get anything that keeps me acquainted with your doings. I read to my juniors a considerable part of the addresses at your anniversary, as notable scraps of modern literature. I mean to have them know, and I am glad of whatever may help to keep me well aware, that there is a world outside of Berkeley, and that it moves.

Sincerely,

EDW. R. SILL.

BERKELEY, Sept. 4, '78.

MY DEAR SIR, — Royce has been duly received, and found to answer the description. He will do excellently well here, there is no doubt — only, he must not stay too long in the wilderness, for his own sake. A certain period of isolation in the Desert and of being tempted by the Devil is probably good for any of the sons of men, but not too long. I shall look out that he is not drudged to death. . . .

I open this again to assure you that I have had no trouble whatever from his independence.



For instead of trying to make him fit into any cast-iron plans of work, I have made the plans fit him; and have given him things to do that would make the given man most useful to the given pupils: giving him logic, for instance, instead of the English language, to teach the freshmen. And he does admirably with it.

Scraps from various letters show how vital and how wide Sill's interests in education were. He is for books and reading, and finds he holds a minority view: he wants a Students' Library to "supply a crying want of our poor youngsters, who have and can have next to no books of their own. I find no one here (except now Royce — and I could hug him for it) to agree with me as to this need of the students. The faculty take the ground that reading is a very dangerous habit for students! I wish I had you here for a spare hour in which to pour out to an appreciating spirit my views of the said faculty for such (and many such) ideas. . . . I am making a list of books to recommend for our public school libraries. If you know of any list made by competent hands I wish you'd tell me. . . . I would give a good deal for a really well-chosen list of a hundred volumes for girls' and boys' reading. . . . I want to get into communication with somebody in England who knows (or cares) about public education there. . . . We have always been hear-

ing about the German schools and universities. I am more and more coming to think it is the *English* schools we want to know about and universities, judging by results in producing thoroughly civilized men. . . . — was spoilt (temporarily only, I hope and believe) by going to Germany before he had thought much himself. I always have said, 'damn the French,' and of late I am getting to extend that gracious sentiment to the Germans."

At President Gilman's suggestion Sill sent his inquiry about English schools to Matthew Arnold and got an answer. One cannot help regretting that this should be apparently the only contact between these two spirits, so close akin, but separated by "the unplumbed, salt, estranging sea": —

"I have just heard in reply from Matthew Arnold, who says some good strong things in favor of the classics — for their own sake, and as *sine qua non* for a real appreciation of English literature. But he does n't tell me what I just now want to know: what books or reports give the truest and fullest idea of education (below university) in England. I particularly want just now a *history* of education in Great Britain. I wish Mr. Arnold would write one, with full notes and comments!"

He keeps at his task of helping his students

even after they have left college and has recourse again to President Gilman: —

BERKELEY, Sept. 9, '78.

MY DEAR SIR, — Do you know of any wise man (or woman) who is interested in the question of occupations for educated girls, and to whom I could write on the subject? Here we graduate every year a number of intelligent and virtuous and industrious young women — but what are they to do? Teaching, of course, is open, but sometimes they don't like that, and are not suited for it, or have n't the nerves to stand the public school drudgery. . . .

They drive me to my wits' end every year, with the impossibility of seeing anything for them but teaching or getting married.

Do you know of any one East who would act as an intelligence office for educated girls?

Or does n't the East, any more than "the Coast," want any more educated girls?

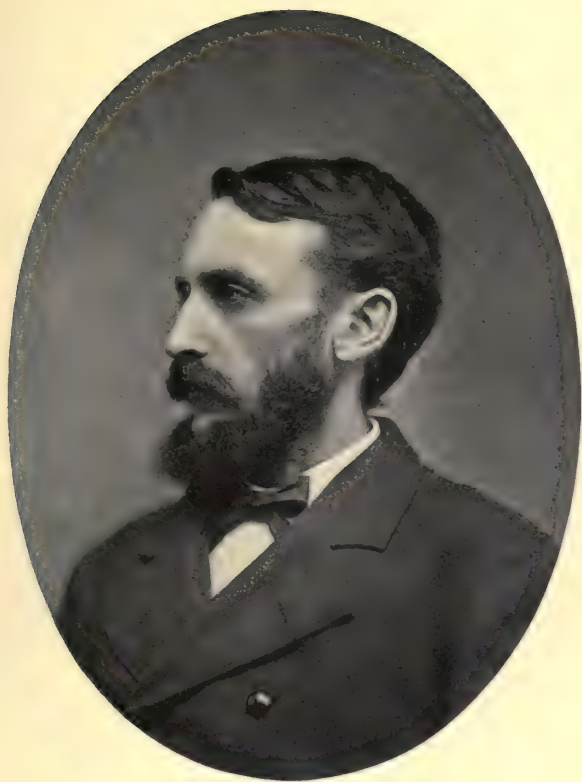
Had we better stop producing them till the demand increases? By the way, when are you going to open Johns Hopkins to girls?

Royce is fairly at work and begins well.

Yours,

EDW. R. SILL.

Royce just comes in and wishes to be remembered to you: says he shall write as soon as he can.



EDWARD R. SILL, 1879





There have not been wanting hints that Sill found himself at times in but imperfect sympathy with his associates. A further hint of it comes in a postscript to a note written late in 1880: —

“They’ve been tossing me in a metaphorical blanket in the faculty for teaching irreligion — especially in a course of lectures I’ve been giving Saturday mornings to teachers from Oakland and San Francisco.

“It would make you laugh if you knew all about it. Alas, that you are so far away! I could from time to time tell you many a good thing, if you were not: humors of the ‘educational’ arena.”

Which recalls a remark among the recollections of one of his students: “Had we not heard from parental criticism outside, and from his absence from the prayer-meeting and church activities with which Oakland abounded, that he was not considered orthodox, I do not believe we should have thought of anything at odds with orthodoxy about him.”

But when a professor’s religious views — or lack of views — become subject of discussion in the faculty there are breakers ahead.

BERKELEY, Feb. 24, ’82.

Some of my young people are trying to find out something about Ruskin’s *St. George’s*

*Society*. Can you lay your hand on any recent promulgation with regard to it? . . . This is one of the last times I shall bother you about such things probably, for I 'm going to quit my chair here and propose not to try to find out anything more than comes along naturally, for the rest of my life. I have even almost a notion I will go to the other extreme and try writing some poetry or something, for a year or two.

I have resigned my professorship — to take effect in August. Congratulate me. I am tired nearly to death — not so much with the work, as with the unpromising conditions of it, and its environments. . . .

The interval was filled with interest. There was first his twentieth anniversary at Yale to which he returned gladly, and there was his first and only visit to Europe. Meantime his interest in writing becomes more *practical*. He writes, freely as ever, to his classmates, Holt and Dexter.

DEAR HENRY, — As to the wee bookie ["The Hermitage"] I have pondered, and more than that have (for the first time in six years) looked over the volume. If I were to get it out again it would be with just half the things out, and just about as much put in their place (from

magazines, etc.). But this I am not anxious to do; for while there is a little demand (as I hear constantly from our booksellers hereabouts) for a new edition, I look upon it as a demand not for poetry but for the *Professor's* poetry. That is, you understand, not a legitimate demand. The poetry, if good for anything, ought to make *me* in demand, not I the poetry.

I am getting on well enough, considering what planet we are on. . . . I am still trying with considerable energy each day (which gives out toward night, I confess) to see what is good and valuable in English (and other peoples') literature. The more I look the less I find, but the more I prize what little I do find.

I should like to make a prose book or two for you to publish, but I shall not live long enough to do it, nor will you ever be likely to be rich enough to afford to publish the sort of books I should write.

BERKELEY, CAL., Feb. 13, 1880.

DEAR HENRY, — Thank you for the information for my inquiring student about the book-man. I knew about the Social Science Association, but my point was that they don't go to the bottom-difficulty, viz., what end are we after? And secondly, is it the end we had

*better* be after? My notion is that Spencer is the only man that has begun to answer that question — namely in the “Data” — and in previous hints which he that did n’t run too fast might read — and that the Associations have been puttering about contagious diseases, drainage, prison reform, and other such excellent matters to work at, but the perfection of which would leave us very little better off than at present. The best thing you can do with such people as we have now is to let the contagious diseases thin ’em out a little, perhaps.

As to your thought that I have scattered, and ought to make myself “favorably known.” My dear fellow, I like your caring for me enough to say this and wish this, but —if you knew about my life of late years and my ideas of life, you would see. I am not and have n’t been trying for it. I have been working to educate, in some high sense, successive classes of young people; and meanwhile to know more about education, and especially literature as a means of it, and about education in its relation to society and life. I am contented to die unknown, if I can arrive at the truth about certain great matters, and can put others in the way thereof. If there is anything which utterly disgusts me and makes me howl aloud and swear, it is these infernal fools who are fighting to get their names abroad, and care for no

other work. That a man like Spencer should *be* well known is a matter of course and all right; but he has not cared for that. Let a man work his work in peace, and the devil take his name — the less likely to get anything more of him than that.

But I am ever yours.

You think I write on various subjects. No. Only on education (which is my hobby) and on literature, with an occasional wild excursion into sociology. I take a great and growing interest in being the cause of writing in others. Have trained up already two "Atlantic" writers and various smaller fry. I like to help at the incubation of poets, especially.

BERKELEY, Feb. 27, 1881.

DEAR HENRY, — . . . Glad you've a 'cello, too. What a shame for George Eliot to make her villain in 'Deronda' play a 'cello. I wonder if Lewes tortured one, and she got to hate it.

Do you know any way to get introduced to the editors of the "Nineteenth Century" or any other first-rate British magazine, where they would take a poem — a sonnet or so now and then — by an American?

I have a friend who has contributed to the "Atlantic," and can, I suppose, whenever she's willing, but her poetry is so far above their level that I want to get it into a British maga-



zine. (This not to be quoted; somebody might think I send to the "Atlantic" and am rejected, which is n't true.)

Why does n't New York have a *first-class* magazine of *Literature* and *Thought*? You start one and make me editor. If a little provincial city like Boston can have a decent magazine, why can't New York have a really good one? Is n't the time ripe? Really, is n't this worth thinking of?

Want me to go to England with you, if you go? Or I suppose you would wish to go on the Continent.

Yours ever as ever,

E. R. SILL.

... I hope there will be a good gathering of our class. Not that I expect it to be a very jolly company, for I presume we are all beginning to get pretty thoroughly sobered down. But there are a good many whom I would like very much to see. It will be interesting to see whether we have all got entirely incompatible points of view, by this time. Shall we find old friends who can't discover a single common ground to meet on — beyond the weather or a college prank or two?

I — for my part — feel a sort of vaguely lonesome desire to make a new friend or two out of the old ones — if it were possible. I

*would* like to find one or two fellows who believe in something that I do — and in doing something that I believe in trying to get done. Or must we all fight it out alone — solitary skirmishers — when we are come to forty year.

Yours ever,

E. R. SILL.

There was “a good gathering” and Sill was welcomed and honored as he had always been, and so, with his heart warmed at the old shrine, set out on his trip to Europe. Doubtless he was worn and tired from his long stint of teaching; for apparently he wrote nothing while he was away. Only the merest scraps of letters remain, and for his impressions of the journey we have to turn to fragments from his later prose.

From Switzerland and the Lake Country he sent scanty notes to Miss Shinn whose career he followed with keen interest: —

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, Sept. 1881.

I was thinking this morning, as I lay waiting for it to be time to get up (and waiting — also — for the clouds to clear away from Mont Blanc, so that I could see it better from the window), about the difficulties that beset writing under all circumstances. It is easy to

see why so few good or valuable books have been written. The wonder is that any one ever surmounts the obstacles, and gets anything accomplished beyond *plans*. I am wondering, also, whether *you* are doing anything with the pen. Remember the Statue and the Bust.

These Alps are very near kin to our Sierras: more picturesque, more full of surprises, more to the painter's hand, perhaps; but hardly more beautiful or impressive — except a few regions, as that of Mont Blanc, the like of which I have not seen. . . .

What a long time it takes the mail to crawl around such a little pocket planet.

AMBLESIDE, WESTMORELAND, Sept. '81.

This violet is a descendant of the one Wordsworth is always writing about. At least I picked it to-day on the side of the path where he must have walked many times, between his house and the Stock Ghyll Force. It is a beautiful region, this of the English Lakes; but one does n't see, after all, why poetry should n't be thought and felt and written as well at Niles or Berkeley, as in Westmoreland. The Alps and this region you must see some day.

In haste, with regards to you all, from both of us

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

There is a curiously interesting allusion, in an essay entitled "Can Tunes be Inherited?" to the voyage to England: —

"It was on a Cunarder in mid-ocean, on the voyage to Liverpool. One evening I was loitering up and down the deck in the warm moonlight, when a group of steerage passengers, sitting or reclining about the foot of the foremast, began to sing in a low and half-unconscious strain in the midst of their talk. They were, it seems, Welsh people, who were choosing this particular time to revisit the fatherland because of an approaching Eistedfod, somewhere in South Wales. It was, I perceived instantly, the 'music of my dreams.' To the best of my knowledge and belief, I had never heard these tunes, or any such tunes, sung, whistled, or played anywhere before. It had so happened that I had never lived in or near any Welsh settlements. I had never chanced to make the acquaintance of so much as one solitary Welsh person, so far as I know. Yet here, sung by these returning Cymric exiles in the yellow moonlight, as we rose and fell on the gently heaving waves, — here were the very strains that had for years been floating, unbidden and unrecognized, through my brain."

When he writes on "The Oldest Thing in the World," he is reminded of the cathedrals, and but for these parenthetical allusions we should



have no idea of his route or the range of his journey: —

“We cross the sea to find a cathedral that is truly ancient, and they point us with pride to this summer’s restorations; but while the group stands admiring them, the American slides away quietly, and ‘slips behind a tomb,’ or is found rapt on some dear, unrestored nook of the ivied cloister. Just so it is on the Continent: Paris is always too wonderfully new and shining, as if Orpheus had strummed it up only this very morning from entirely new materials. My favorite spot is in the Louvre, between the five-footed bull of Assyria and the rose-colored granite sarcophagus of Rameses III. The Hague is delightfully swept-up and washed-down and immaculately fresh and resplendent; but my best moment there was when, in the museum, I took in my hand a gold coin of Alexander, and as it lay cool and smooth in my palm I thought it was probably one that the conqueror himself flung ringing against the tub-staves of Diogenes, the day that worthy growled at him to ‘get out of his sunshine.’

“It is astonishing how insensible we sometimes are to the most beautiful or sublime spectacles. Noble scenes, which at another time would inspire the imagination and thrill the heart with a tumult of emotions, now unfold their glory before our unmoved eyes, and the



humdrum thoughts plod along their accustomed way. Travellers know this phenomenon very well. Ely Cathedral lives in my memory as a delicious vision of solemn loveliness; but when my friends praise York Minster, I hardly recall that I was ever there. This indifference is to be ascribed to the fact that in York my brain happened to be dough or putty for the time being, and in no respect on the architecture of the minster."

Returning from England in October, stopping by the way at Cambridge, New Haven, and Baltimore, Sill took up his work at Berkeley for what was to be his last year. A note to President Gilman and a few lines to Dexter bridge the episode over, and now our man of letters takes up what, in spite of his New England conscience, his inherited predilection for preaching, and his relentless ethical tendencies, was his real calling and life-work — literature. This is the last of the pedagogy: —

BALTIMORE, Oct. 20, '81.

MY DEAR SIR, — I am sorry not to say "how d' ye do" and "good-bye" in person, but I would not come round to your house lest you should see me when you were really feeling unfit for it. I trust you will take a run away and not let yourself get ill. I have enjoyed looking

into the rooms of the university a bit, and hearing some of the exercises, and wish I could stay longer; but must return to California next week. My stay in England cheated me out of my anticipated visit here and elsewhere in the East: though I did get a peep at Yale and Harvard.

In haste, as ever yours, E. R. SILL.

TO PRES. GILMAN.

I am very sorry to hear of Mr. Lanier's death. His book on English verse is the only thing extant on that subject that is of any earthly value. I wonder that so few seem to have discovered its great merit.

I want to find an assistant in English Composition and Rhetoric, etc.: if possible one who has in him the making of a professor of English literature, to take my place before long. Know him?

Yours, E. R. S.

BERKELEY, March 26, '82.

I sent you one college paper epitaph, and here is another. You may be interested to see it, and I am rather glad to have you; for maybe nobody will ever say any more good-natured things about me, unless it be on a veritable tombstone. 'Nil de moribundis nisi bonum.' . . .

"Perhaps I ought to add that my resignation was entirely voluntary (not that I have any reason to think the Regents have any exaggerated estimate of my value). My position had become intolerable for certain reasons that are not for pen and ink, and after a good deal of consideration I decided to leave it; though I have no immediate intention of leaving Berkeley."

One of the last things he wrote that bear the academic stamp is a bit of jocular verse to his colleague Stearns, on which light note we may let the chapter close: —

July, 1882.

TO R. E. C. S. HORTATORY

"Come back, my children," arid Berkeley cries,  
Come to my leathery gum trees' bluish shade,  
Come where my stubbly hillside slowly dries,  
And fond adhesive tarweeds gently fade.

Here murmurs soft the locomotive's shriek,  
And o'er the plain the antic dummy squeals;  
Here picnic eggshells bloom beside the creek,  
That sweetly 'mid its dried-up hummocks steals.

At morning howls the neighbor's pensive dog,  
At noon the flower-beds don their stony crust,  
At evening softly falls the genial fog,  
And *every* hour bestows its bounteous dust.

Come — when you've *got* to, not a day before!  
Till then, stay there, and heed not Berkeley's lures;  
Drink health and blessing from the mountain's store,  
And still, dear Stearns, believe me,

Ever yours.

## VII

### MAN OF LETTERS

ALTHOUGH his relation to the university closed with the end of the academic year in June, 1882, Sill did not immediately leave Berkeley, but remained ordering his affairs, and putting into effect some old plans which included preparing for the press a collection of his poems, "The Venus of Milo, and Other Poems," to be privately printed for his friends. Perhaps he found it easier also in the accustomed surroundings to make the transition from teaching to writing. At any rate, he lost no time in entering upon the new profession; he seems to have given no thought to a new post as professor, but to have launched himself at once upon literature. In September he was in full correspondence with the editor of the "Atlantic," and had already taken a hand in starting the new California magazine, "The Overland Monthly."

The correspondence with Thomas Bailey Aldrich, then editor of the "Atlantic," grew more intimate as time went on, and the relation became one of mutual admiration and regard. Aldrich wrote twenty years later: —

"It was my good fortune to be one of the first to recognize the fine quality of his poetry and the very first to introduce him to his public — through the pages of the 'Atlantic.' He was sadly in want of encouragement at the time, and I encouraged him by printing everything he sent to me. He was a busy maker of lyrics in those days, and in order not to seem to have too much Sill in the magazine, I published some of the poems over a pen-name, at his own suggestion."

That was a little later; he was now knocking at the door: —

BERKELEY, CAL., Sept. 11, 1882.

EDITOR ATLANTIC: —

DEAR SIR, — Your kind note of the 4th declining my paper on the Anglo-Saxon language is just received.

I trouble you with a reply only because I have sent a second paper, and I want to assure you that my articles are neither of them scraps from my reading of other men's work, but are at least "my own" if "poor things." I've no doubt your judgment is best, as to how it would strike readers of the "Atlantic" and the first paper does no doubt *sound* like "odds and ends," since it has struck you that way, for one. I had an idea my tracing of the Yankee dialect and other "mistakes" in speech back to Anglo-



Saxon was new. Would you mind telling me where I may find anything about that? I suppose it is only another case like the man in Ohio who invented the screw propeller over again after it had been used a half-century or so. One has to be horribly well read to hope to contribute to the mag[azine].

I warn you that I shall send you some verse if you do not accept my prose.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

BERKELEY, CAL., Oct. 3, 1882.

EDITOR ATLANTIC:—

DEAR SIR, — I send you a review of Herbert Spencer's "Education." It seems to me high time that the error of this very influential treatise should be shown, and I should be very glad if it could be shown in just the region covered by the "Atlantic" — that is, among the *illuminati* — and so "work down" through educational thought and practice. I believe in Spencer, for the most part, but I am sure he is wrong in the fundamental theory of this treatise. I enclose stamps for return if not used.

Truly yours,

E. R. SILL.

BERKELEY, CAL., Oct. 31, 1882.

EDITOR ATLANTIC: —

DEAR SIR, — Your card of 24th is received telling me of acceptance of my review of Spencer's "Education." Can you let me read a proof of it? I am accustomed to that luxury, and don't like to forego it unless it is necessary. To be sure, I have the habit of making my manuscript ready for the printer, even to punctuation, but for all that, one can always, by a little touch here and there in just the right place, add greatly to the value of a paper (or a poem even). I have been accustomed to tell my students that the value is usually added by the erasing touch here and there: that is to say, by lessening the denominator rather than increasing the numerator. If you are not afraid of my being too savage with my own work, I hope you will send me a proof.

Truly yours,

E. R. SILL.

BERKELEY, CAL., Nov. 18, 1882.

EDITOR ATLANTIC: —

DEAR SIR, — I send in to-day's mail return proofs of my paper on Herbert Spencer's "Theory of Education." I registered them because our distance is so great that it would not do to have them lost on the way. On the last page I have changed the spelling of Shak-

spere's name from mere force of habit. If you prefer to have your magazine hold to a uniform spelling the other way, of course I don't care a fig about it. I have very liberal views as to an editor's privilege to make non-essential changes. Nothing except poetry has any rights which a competent editor is bound to respect.

I am much obliged to somebody for calling my attention to certain infelicities, in blue pencil. If your proof-reader, please make him my compliments.

Truly yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., March 21, 1883.

MR. ALDRICH: —

MY DEAR SIR, — I send registered a paper on "English Literature in the College Course." It is something I have been getting ready to say for a long time, and I feel sure that it is true. It is for you to judge, of course, whether people will be interested in it; but it follows naturally after my paper on Spencer's "Theory," as giving some positive suggestions, after that, which was negative criticism. It is calculated to stir some persons to wrath, no doubt; but it would be good for them. And I believe that the best of the readers of the "Atlantic" will agree with me and be glad to hear the thing said. At any rate, I would like to have it appear in the

“Atlantic,” rather than elsewhere, because I know it would do most good from that vantage-ground. You will find the *ball* of the whole cartridge in the last pages: the rest is for powder.

May I ask you to keep the manuscript for me for a few days if you should not use it, and I will write or call for it. And will “the editors” be kind enough to let me know by a note what you decide?

Pardon my addressing you personally, this time.

Sincerely yours,      E. R. SILL.

Sill had now settled down at the “hospitable house” with which we are familiar at Cuyahoga Falls, and his correspondence ordered itself with three nuclei — the group of California friends at Berkeley, his Yale classmates in New Haven or New York, and the magazine editors. To California he wrote gossiping letters, not disdaining the weather, although he was tempted into jocular verse when he got meteorology in reply: —

TO MY CORRESPONDENT WHO WRITES OF  
THE WEATHER

Write all about *yourself*, my dear!  
For I don't care, I'm sure — Oh,  
Reports as if from “Probs” to hear,  
Or from the Weather Bureau.

I wish to hear of *you* — the straws  
That show which way you're blowing;  
I want to know your life, because  
Your life is worth the knowing.

I love to follow all your hours;  
Your dreams when day is winking;  
And what you like, in folks and flowers,  
And what you think you're thinking.

Then put away upon a shelf  
The outside world; and whether  
It snow or blow, just write *yourself*,  
And never mind the weather!

"Zero weather. Snow creaks and crackles under foot. Two people cross a carpet and give a sharp spark to one another's noses. Went skating yesterday. Did n't 'cut across the shadow of a star' because it was daylight, and besides the critics say it can't be done. 'Shadow'? No: what is it? 'Reflex'? 'Sparkle'?

"A white world, with skeleton trees — nervous systems anatomized and set up in the air, frozen stiff — is a queer thing: unearthly."

"It's a bad time to take up trees in the winter; ground is frozen; roots can't go down. This is a parable. If it were summer here, no doubt I should be taking long walks and going fishing, and mooning about, nights — and keeping my old environment out of my head as thoroughly as possible. But it's winter — the dead vast and middle of it (as Howells quotes



of the summer) — and my roots are all in the air as yet, and I feel extremely queer. We are supposed to have got settled. . . . I have established a writing-table with the birds contiguous, as near a window as I dare put 'em for fear of freezing their noses off; you remember how the cold air pierces in between the sashes of a window like a long thin knife? . . . They manage to have some green leaves and posies under a glass — but what looking gardens! They were spaded in the fall, so that when not mercifully veiled with snow they look all lumpy mud, frozen. Gracious! what a looking world.

“I am supposed to be entered upon a mad career of literary work. Have so far only written some very mild verses — suitable for nursery use in some amiable but weak-minded family. But then I’ve been skating twice! Think of that — real ice, too. You can make Mr. B—— feel bad about that, if you tell him — and make him think he’d like to be here; but he would n’t.

“It’s a curious illusion of yours out there, that you can go out and pick flowers and hear leaves rustle and see grass grow and feel thorough-going sunshine. You can’t, you know, ’cause it’s winter everywhere: snow and ice, or frozen slush and mud — it *must* be. *I* used to have that same hallucination when I was out there. Queer. Effect of the Climate, I s’pose.”

“The air here makes a man feel like stirring around lively. Sets your feet to walking you of indefinite distances. But there’s no splendid Berkeley view to behold when you get to the end of your walk. We can’t have everything in one spot. What’s the use of crying for the moon? Better flatten one’s nose on the pane and gaze upon it and try to be glad he has n’t got it. Should have to take care of it and pay taxes on it if we had it.”

“I am and shall be interested in all California goings-on, for I am glad to accept the axiom some one has quoted to me, ‘Once a Californian, always a Californian.’ We may be forced to blush sometimes for our politicians out there, but our Bay civilization is a thing to be congratulated on. . . .”

“Spring just faintly appearing here — snubbed by a snow-storm every few days. No leaves out, but robins and blue-birds, and buds swelling.”

“Summer is a-cumin in. Loudly sings cucku, — that is to say, the wobbin, and the gluebird, and the noriole. It is 80° — warm, and a thunder-storm night before last, and crocuses and jonquils and hyacinths and prim-roses are in bloom in the gardens, and hepati-

cas and anemones, as well as arbutus, in the woods. But there is not enough oxygen in the warm south wind. It is a very soft and musical wind on the blossomed elms and maples, and just beginning to be scented with cherry blossoms — but it lacks the oxygen of the sea breeze. Funny old world! Where there are lovely things to see in the country, the air tries to prevent your having the energy of a dormouse, to go out to walk and see them. Where the air is bracing, there's nothing much to go out for to see. Evidently a world not meant to make its denizens perfectly contented. The duty of not being contented! what an easy duty!"

His letters to Dexter and Williams are in the old vein, and there is one to (Governor) Baldwin showing how well the college bond held: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., April 25. '83.

Your note and the package came yesterday. Thank you very much. . . .

But the real difficulty with me is to get *books*. No, there's a worse one — to get *people*. But that, I suppose, we all have, everywhere. I have organized a town library association in the village here. Where can we get any *gifts* of books? . . . I am trying to get the *schools* into the library work. But oh, for *books*!

I hope to see your face again some day. But I don't know when or where. It is a long ways from here to New Haven. Further than from San Francisco, a little. . . .

CUYAHOGA FALLS, May 7, '83.

. . . Papers again received. Thank you. "The Critic" I see. It is Bohemian, though bright enough. Why can we have no magazines or papers that are not just a little second choppy? "Life," now, as compared with "Punch"! Gray-Parker, compared with Du Maurier (why does the former never by any accident depict a lady or gentleman? Because he never saw one, near?)

"The Spectator" I like very much. Should like your copies all the better if you ran your pencil here and there where you have said "hear, hear." A paper with a pencil line is most as good as a letter. "The Church Times" is the funniest comic paper I have seen. No wonder they can support a "Punch" in England, where the church is itself an education in the ludicrous for the whole people.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., May 15, '83.

TUESDAY.

MY DEAR BALDWIN, — Yours of 10th is at hand. I was unusually glad of your letter, from the fact that I looked upon you as pretty much

gone out of my horizon. This epistle brings you in again, most visibly, and I seem to recognize that you were not gone at all. You speak in a very friendly way of my small volume of poems. Yes, they are very middle-age-y; and maybe it's better to let the youngsters do the piping, as they do the dancing. Tityrus with a bald head and false teeth and a shrunk shank, — it's enough to titter-us, is n't it? (That's the very kind of bad pun you used to do in freshman year.) Land of love! — that was in 1857-58. Was that just before or just after the glacial epoch? As to the Bones poem, I shall be most happy to try to have something. Perhaps I shall be your way next week, or week after, for a day or two, and will try to see you.

Thank you very much for your kind offer of hospitality to us. I don't know whether it will be possible for my wife to go on, but I should be most happy to accept for one or both of us. Let me see. The Bones address will be sort of humorous, won't it? — and so the poem might be pretty serious — if short? Or must I frisk and be very foolish — “pin-nacled dim in the intense inane”? I think I'll *have* to be serious.

Ever yours,

E. R. SILL.

He accepted the invitation, read a poem at



the reunion of Skull and Bones at Yale, and spent a few weeks of old-fashioned vacation at his birthplace, Windsor, whence he writes:—

WINDSOR, CONN., JUNE, 1883.

I have been making a pilgrimage to Ellington to-day. . . . It has been, to begin with, a perfect June day, and you remember the look of it in these regions: the blue sky with white dapples in it, the lustrous leaves not yet long enough out of their sheaths to have lost their tender new green, the fields full of daisies (too full, the honest farmer would say — but not too full for the passing vagabonds to enjoy), the laurel glimmering in the woods (remember it?), the roads as they run through thickety places full of the smell of wild grape blossoms (remember 'em?), the rye soft and wavy (nothing but rye in the sandy plains betwixt here and Ellington, or a little tobacco and spindly corn) — plain living and high thinking must be the rule out around there among the farmers. . . .

Ellington is beautiful. It might be just a little *quiet* in the winter, for gay people like you . . . but at this season it is great. There's a glorious silence there. I saw a man, and a boy with a toy wagon, and another man, all on the street at once. But they went into dooryards and were seen no more. What a dignity and placid reserve about the place! The houses

all look like the country-seats of persons of great respectability who had retired on a competence — and retired a great ways while they were about it. And what *big* houses they used to build. *Used* to, I say, because there is n't a house over there that looks less than a thousand years old: not that they look old as seeming worn or rickety at all, but old as being very stately and wise and imperturbable. I am struck, all about here in Connecticut, with the well-kept-up look of the houses. Paint must be cheap — no, 't is n't that. Paint is probably pretty dear; but they believe in keeping everything slicked up. Yet there are a few oldest of the old houses that came out of the ark, I know.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, July, 1883.

I have myself just “lit” from a flight among Eastern places. Have been gone about two months: the old habit, you see, of getting away for summer vacation. No mountains, to be sure, to flee to, but the White *hills* — very small — are considered and believed to be mountains in New England, and I would not cruelly undeceive them there. I called them mountains whenever I could think of it — especially Mount Washington, which really is a very pretty piece of rising ground: specially at sunset when it “wraps the drapery of its”

cloud-shadows and ridge-shadows about it, and gets rosy on top. . . . I had a few days in New York: found it as of old (and more than of old, a good deal) a splendid city: nothing in Europe handsomer or gayer than Fifth Avenue of an afternoon, or by electric light in the evening. But I rather hated it, except as a wonderful show, and got out of it quickly to old Windsor, which is sleepier than ever: lovely old place though, — “home of perpetual peace.”

It is a generous soul that writes without reference to accurate tally of give and get. You and —— are about the only ones among my friends that will do it. Why should n't we? Are we bound by the slaveries that women submit to, with their double entry (front entry and back entry) book-keeping of social “calls” (hence the phrase, the “call of duty”?) Poo' women! Who would be thou!

July 16, '83.

I am just back from a summering in the ancient and somnolent pastures of New England: some weeks at my old home, Windsor, in the Connecticut River valley — you remember how green and peaceful that region is, corn-fields and hay-fields, and elm-shaded streets and maple-shaded houses (with green blinds, mostly shut tight), and patches of their pretty woods — the trees only shrubs to a California

eye, but ever so fresh and graceful, and lustrous with rain or dew: a week in the White Mountains — they, too, dwarf varieties, but capable of good coloring and various picturesque “effects”: and a few days on the Maine seashore.

No discount on the Atlantic Ocean. The only thing East that does n’t seem like a feeble imitation, after living so long in California. (I hardly except the people as to certain characteristics. . . .)

Aug., ’83.

It is an evidence of the irrational attachment one gets (as cats do) to places, that the Berkeley postmark (which the good Dr. — makes very conscientiously: *ex pede Herculem*, the mark of a careful and just man) gives me always a pleasant little twinge of homesickness. It is an evidence of the somewhat more rational attachment we get to people, that your handwriting does likewise, only more so. . . .

We are having hot, moist, muggy summer weather. We live on the recollections of the Maine coast and the White Mountains. It is pleasant to know that *there* it does n’t rain hot water. Once in a while I reflect, also, with pleasure, that you in Berkeley are cool and vigorous and chipper, while we are being par-boiled. But there are beautiful things to *behold* here on these summer mornings, and glorious



summer nights. We have moonlight here. The full moon is a ripper, I tell you. Great on a row of maples — big fellows — with a shade deep and black. — I hope Mr. Crane is all right again.

Aug. 11, '83.

DEAR KELLOGG, — Yours of 4th was received yesterday, and papers containing the same sad news of Mr. Crane's death. I had heard that he was seriously ill, but afterward that he was supposed to be out of danger; so that I was greatly surprised when the news came. Somehow he seemed a man that would not die: there seemed such an amount of quick, active life in him. I always thought of him as so thoroughly alive. He always came to my recollection as he looked when speaking in the Club — perfectly quiet in manner and tone, and every fibre of his brain evidently electric. I had written him a letter a few weeks ago, from an impulse to tell him how well I appreciated him and liked him. I am specially glad now that I did. Another evidence that a man had better always follow his first impulse. . . . And it [his mind] was *kept* clear and reinforced all the time by an integrity of intellect that made him look first of all to see what was true. Other men were after the right sound, or the prudent word, or the polite one, or the amiable one, or one that would stop a gap when ideas



were wanting. He was after the exact and undulcerated *fact*. And my brain was actually in love with his, ever since I first knew him.

Personally, he never in the least warmed toward me; but I never in the least looked for that. One of the things that made me like him was that I seemed to see that he divined my own limitations, and weighed me pretty accurately. I admired him the more from the fact that he did not at all admire me,<sup>1</sup> and I liked him the more from the fact that his intellectual honesty seemed to do justice to mine — a thing which from boyhood has been a permanent craving with me. Well, I did n't expect him to die, and I am mighty sorry to lose him from this world. Yes, he is one of the men that help one to believe in the immortality of the soul. I think Crane — the real man — must be, somewhere, to-day, just as truly as he was a month ago.

To the Californian friends, particularly Miss Shinn, whose literary taste — having largely formed it himself — he found congenial, he wrote freely and without reserve, mixing sense and nonsense, gossip and criticism as the following scraps and paragraphs from the letters of 1883-84 will show: —

<sup>1</sup> In fact, Mr. Crane cherished a peculiar admiration for Professor Sill.

I've just finished a paper on the co-education question (you see how the public, at last, has got excited about that? Oh, they will get the old foggy colleges into it, yet) which I shall maybe send to some magazine. The trouble is, nobody agrees with anything he reads unless he agreed with it beforehand — so what's the use? I don't believe a man was ever convinced of anything since Adam. People blunder into opinions somehow, and then stick to 'em.

I'll tell you what you are sure to enjoy reading — Jane Welch's letters. I was reading a book about Rossetti t' other day, in which he is quoted as saying she was a "bitter little woman" — but she probably snubbed him and thought small beer of his brass crucifixes and æsthetic flummeries. She was a cracker at letter writing, anyway. And she must (from his own account of it) have suffered no end from Carlyle's dreadful ways. She says in one letter to him, "it would never do for me to leave you for good [I infer she had really considered that question], for I should have to go back next day to see how you were taking it"! — I wish I could step into my neighbor's there to see how *you* are taking it. Bet you have forgotten where we lived and how I spell my name! (Two l's — capital S).

So my A—— verses went in unrevised. Just as well. The *idea* is all there. I almost feel like despising and violating all *form*, when I see the fools that worship it. I always understood why Emerson made his poems rough — and I sympathize more than ever.

Nor do I like *two adjectives* with comma, in description. Always, I should say, strike out one of them (*vide* — *vs.* Turgeneff).

Exception 1. When the first qualifies the second + the noun as one quantity (no comma).

2. When the two describe practically the same quality (as, the long, narrow slit). This is not to be found in books, I guess, but is correct, is n't it?

I don't think there's anything in the idea that a man must stay out of medicine unless he can go in like a monomaniac — i.e., an enthusiast. Why should n't people go into things soberly, seeing the other side, and all sides; and with no vows to stay in till death do them part. It *sounds* well to lay down great moral axioms about what people should do and should n't do, and get them off solemnly to young people — to their great impressment but ultimate confusion; but it is a little absurd.

Read Caine's "Recollections of Rossetti" —

but it will make you melancholy. — Heavens! what does n't? Carlyle and Emerson correspondence, for instance.

Jefferson's "Real Lord Byron" (Franklin Square) makes him awfully real indeed: selfish, vulgar, low. Shelley was ten times as much of a *man*.

C. Kegan Paul's "Essays" are good.

Old Don Quixote is perennially good reading. A Doré copy lies on our parlor table, and every few days at some odd ten minutes I open it and read again. That of the enchanted boat, for instance. It is universal human nature. Cervantes really was like Shakspeare.

Do you know Landor's "Imaginary Conversations"? Some of *them* are Shaksperian. Read some of them if you have n't. They are real dramatic poems, like Browning's, some of them. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, e.g. — and Dante and Beatrice.

Hamerton's "Round my House" is pretty reading for light reading. — But I have lately some moods that require the things that go right to the core of the intellect, or else the piteous and tragic things that wring my heart. Sometimes history — plain prose — will serve best. Mommsen's "Rome," e.g., in the Julius Cæsar epoch. The novelists for the most part seem idle chatterers. . . .

Read "Emily Brontë" in the Famous Women Series (the style, etc., you need not resent or criticise — the total effect of the picture is all) — then re-read "Villette."

How do you like Miss Phelps's new book? I confess it moved me greatly — perhaps hitting just the right mood to do it in. . . . Read A. Trollope's "Autobiography"? (Franklin Square and big print.) To me very interesting. Think of that mother of his! Would like to have known her. Be sure you read Renan's "Recollections."

Oct. 25, '83.

Did you know Kant wrote some poems when young (I don't know but later than young)? This is one: —

"Was auf das Leben folgt, deckt tiefe Finsterniss;  
Was uns zu thun gebührt, des [sic] sind wir nur gewiss,  
Dem kann, wie Lilienthal, kein Tod die Hoffnung rauben,  
Der glaubt, um recht zu thun, recht thut, um froh zu glauben."

Have you read Daudet's bit of reminiscence of Turgenieff in "Century"? And the portrait!

If only men did n't die just as they are getting ripe and great! Death *is n't* a gentle angel. The old view is the true view. No flowers can hide the skull. It is not only awful — it is horrible that people should die.



You are not like me if you don't find yourself doubting the tangible existence of people when you have no current evidence. (Talk about belief in immortality: I find it hard enough to believe in real being at all, when it is well around a corner anywhere, out of sight. — Still — I *do* sort o' believe in immortality. Can't make myself believe it's all hereditary prepossession either. But whether old friends will ever have time to find each other out?) (*Quid metui resurrectus?* Meantime this life is enough for us to think about. There's no doubting we live now.) . . .

The moral of it all is, brace up! As young Orme says in "Orley Farm" (you have to read two or three of Trollope after his "Autobiography"), it won't do for a fellow ever to knock under. To himself, you know. To let himself see that he's afraid. Besides, what is there to squelch anybody, in all these things? It's an episode anyhow. — What 'll you bet we are not immortal? In that case the whole affair is only a picnic — a day's excursion — and no matter how it comes out. To-morrow will have new chances. I rather incline to think that all those people who die with no hope of (or fear of) immortality are in for the biggest surprise of their lives.

Jan. 4, '84.

You will like this winter weather. Remember how the snow creaks under foot, in zero-cold? and the good smell of frozen oxygen, and how your mustache freezes up, and how the fields of blue-white snow stretch away everywhere, and Pan retires all his passions and emotions from the landscape, and leaves only pure intellect — cold and white and clear? — One ought to have, though, a house about seven miles square, full of open fires and open friends — both kept well replenished and *poked up*. — I should like to see some of these winter scenes, and some of these sunsets, out of *your* west window. — I wish you a very happy rest-of-the-year.

You say you have written many times to me mentally — and say that such things bring no replies. You do them injustice. Certainly they do. Only the replies are *also* mental. You have had no end of such.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, May 12, 1884.

DEAR MISS B., — You recollect old Geo. Herbert after a season of dumps congratulates himself that once more he doth “relish versing” — so there are faint symptoms that now that the apple trees are at last in blossom I may relish writing to my friends. Alack, I have not so many to whom I *ever* write, or from

whom I am ever written to (I no longer teach the English language), that I need wait so long to write at least a brief scratch. . . . The truth is I desire to hear from you. Otherwise there are hardly enough apple trees out to move me, even this May morning. — Is it any wonder people talk about the weather? For what is there that plays the deuce with us like that? I confess I am completely under it half the time — and more than half under, the balance. It's very pretty now, I assure you. Treacherous, a little, but full of greenery and blossoms. In New England, no doubt, it is still prettier. In the past week the sky — even in Ohio — has been summer blue. You remember what that is, between big round pearly white clouds? But for six months previously it was a dome of lead, or dirty white. Now and then, of a rare day, the color of a black and blue spot on a boy's knee. Once or twice in a month, when the sun tried to shine, the hue of very poor skim milk. The gods economizing, no doubt, and taking that mild drink in place of nectar — or slopping it around feeding their cats — or the Sky terriers. If I recollect aright, you have midsummer in May, there. Hot forenoons and bootiful fog in the evening? I would like to help you dig your garden. We have now apple, pear, and cherry trees in blossom, yellow currant, white and purple lilacs, flowering

cherry: pansies, tulips, lily of the valley, and genuine solid green turf sprinkled with gold buttons of dandelions. The air is full of fragrance. The robins, bluebirds, wrens, and orioles are building wonderful nests all over the place. Three red-and-black game bantams are parading on the lawn, and seven baby bantams about as big as the end of my thumb are skittering around under the laylocs.

That is a pleasant picture — “robins, bluebirds, wrens and orioles building nests all over the place, and bantams parading on the lawn.” It suggests an easy, well-to-do, comfortable way of life. In a sense this is a fair impression. The home of his uncle and father-in-law at Cuyahoga Falls was an ample house — the house of a successful banker in a Middle Western town. As to the household itself, Sill described it himself, in a little unsigned article for the “Atlantic” on “The Cheerfulness of Birds,” with a fulness of detail from which he would probably have shrunk if he had not felt sure that both his own identity and that of the household were safe from surmise: —

We are, at our house, I confess, a rather sombre family. There are no young children among us. The elderly people are silent by temperament, and grow more silent as age comes on. There is never any ill-temper in the house, — never any bickering



or nagging, no spiteful epigrams or sidelong sarcasms. We seem really to like each other, although we are all "blood-relations." We get on, therefore, from year to year. No doubt we seem to others a happy family, and perhaps we are; but we are never a merry family. The house is so built that the rooms where the sun shines liberally are not the rooms most used; not the rooms, for example, that we are accustomed to use together. The heating apparatus is that most successful and most lugubrious one — steam. The radiators are large black surfaces, with just enough of gilt at edge and corner to make the black hopelessly conspicuous, flattening themselves against the wall as if they were aware of their ugliness. No blazing and sparkling and cheerily snapping open fire illuminates any of the "living" rooms. (The kitchen is the most cheerful place in the house, — as I have occasionally seen it, empty and deserted, after the cook and the maid had retired at night, — with the rich hot coals still sending out their rays merrily through chink and crevice of the range, for the sole benefit of the house-cat, stretched out with full *abandon* on the toasting-hot hearth.) Our deplorable habit, at meals, is to attend to the business in hand with grave decorum — very decently and in order, no doubt, but for the most part silently. I have known some one of us, apparently for the moment sensible of something oppressive in this gravity, to venture on a frivolous remark, and to have it received in silence, as a thing not congruous with the roast meat, especially during the solemn action of its being carved and distributed. We come down to breakfast not at all out of humor (we are not invalids), but disposed to a very calm and peaceful demeanor. We wish each other good-morning with a genuine affection,



but the remark, having been responded to, is not followed up. An observation concerning the weather does not usually lead anywhere. When we have a more lively visitor, we easily fall in with his mood, and are capable of a good deal of sprightliness on such an occasion, — not in the least labored or affected, either; but by ourselves we are habitually silent, and occupied with our own sedate reflections.

All this makes — I cannot but see it and feel it, much as I myself share in the responsibility — a sombre house.

But there is one bright spot, and that furnishes the text of my utterances now upon the subject. It is the tame canary, "Johnny-quil." Not only is he himself always cheerful (and who ever saw a well canary depressed?), but he is the cause of cheerfulness in others. In the midst of one of our long silences we hear his little pipe ringing out from his sunny eyrie in the porch or the sitting-room, and some one remarks, "Just hear Johnny-quil!" Our barometers all go up ten degrees. Besides, everybody chirrup to him. It is not only, therefore, what he says to us, but what we say to him, that makes him the enlivener of the family. You can't exactly chirrup to a grown-up human being, — especially if he is carving a fowl, or reading a religious newspaper. But it is always possible, and apparently always inevitable, to say something chipper and chirpy to the bird, as we pass his cage. I have noticed this odd thing: that when Rhodora or Penelope or Cassandra stops at the cage, and says some little nonsensical thing to the small yellow songster, or half whistles to him in passing, not only does he pipe up, but pretty soon you hear her own voice, from a distant room, humming a bit of

some gay waltz or madrigal. The unconscious lifting of one's own more sober mood to the higher level of the bird's irrepressible good spirits lasts on a little beyond the instant. I recommend him and his merry kind to other silent houses. He is worth his weight in sunshine.

The setting, so to speak, for the house we shall also get from Sill, in a few sentences from another of his intimate little essays for the "Atlantic," a picture of the first snow: —

Yesterday the maples and oaks and the great round-topped linden on the lawn were still full of their wealth of color. There it lies now on the snow, — smouldering reds and yellows, burning with dusky blushes on (not in, as ordinarily) the level floor of the white cold.

The prettiest thing, however, in this particular case of the first snow, is the way its softness, early in the night, caused it to stick fast, silvering the windward side of every object. Not only are the firs deep loaded, the lower boughs weighted and banked till each tree is, from the ground up, a continuous tent of snow, but the trunks and every round limb and forking twig of the elms and oaks are puffed with fleckless white. It makes of them a vivid kind of crayon sketch: every bough has its dark shadow away from the sun, and its white highlight toward the wind. The gate-posts are capped high with the rounded ermine.

The little wren-house on the stub of the dead pear tree is piled thick to windward, and fringed with icicles on the eaves to leeward, like the abodes of all the rest of us. Across the river, on the crown of the slope, stands a straight high wall of woods. It is a

reversed drawing in charcoal; all the tops, the soft mass of bare boughs and twigs, being shaded dark, while the stems of the tall hickories and oaks stand forth white as marble columns, and on the smooth snow of the lawn stands a slender upright wand, left solitary in the deserted tennis-court, where it supported the net in the middle.

## VIII

### THE CRAFTSMAN

IN the pleasant surroundings just described, having "established a writing-table with the birds contiguous," and a "favorite pacing-ground, a wide path from the round rose-bed to the elm tree, running between lines of stately cannas," he continued at his writing. He might poke fun at it as he did, — "I am supposed to be entered upon a mad career of literary work. Have so far only written some very mild verses," etc., — but in his heart he knew it to be as serious a matter as anything had ever been to him. In some respects the conditions at Cuyahoga Falls were all that could be desired, but those that were lacking were terribly significant. First and foremost was the lack of atmosphere and companionship. He had "no man like-minded with him." There was not a fellow-craftsman within five hundred miles who shared his ambitions and with whom he could talk over his plans; moreover, he was far removed from the main currents of literary activity — such as it was in this country. That he should have been able under these conditions to produce as much both in poetry and prose as he did and



THE HOME, CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO





to keep the flame in the shrine ablaze is an achievement. Yet it may explain why in the five years between leaving Berkeley and his death he planned and executed no work of substantial proportions. A letter to Miss Shinn, then editing the "Overland Monthly," throws light on a frame of mind which was recurrent rather than permanent, but which shows the effect of being in a back-water — and a touch of his inveterate self-distrust: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO, Aug. 16, 1884.  
SATURDAY.

I sent you yesterday a pretty long screed about Emerson, telling you to use the whole of it, or part of it, or very little of it, or none at all of it. I should be equally well suited either way.

I don't think other people feel the way I do about that. When a thing is written, they have a trembling hope, at least, that it is good, and anyhow wish to have it used. But you should see the equanimity with which I write thing after thing — both prose and verse — and stow them away, never sending them anywhere, or thinking of printing any book of them, at present, if ever. Sometimes I do think I will leave a lot of stuff for some one to pick out a post-humorous volume from — but more and more my sober judgment tells me that

other people have seen or will see all that I have, and will state it better.

It is very strange, though, the difference between my positiveness of judgment as to other people's writing and my lack of any power to judge at all of my own. It would, perhaps, be an interesting psychological study for you if I could make you see my mind about this. I judge swiftly and positively of literature in general. For one thing, the consciousness has more and more been ground into me that my whole point of view is hopelessly different from that of people in general — I mean educated and intelligent people. Nor do I have the compensation of feeling this difference a superiority. I should have made an excellent citizen of some other planet, maybe, and they got me on the wrong one.

I don't feel the least fitness for a writer. When anything of mine is to be printed I have often a horrid sense — now the fingers of the whole universe will be pointing at this fellow as an example of a wretch that has mistaken his vocation. When it is once printed, I feel instantly relieved, in the knowledge that nobody reads things — after all — or cares whether they are good or not. The fingers I perceive to be all pointing at more conspicuous objects, or being harmlessly sucked in the mouth: so I don't care a bit — till the next thing is about to be

printed. The "Century" has had some time a sonnet of mine. You would not believe how I have actually shuddered internally each month with fear that now I am going to be stuck up on a post without a rag on me at last, and my nightmare was to come true.

I don't believe I ever shall write a thing that is really good. Yet, with it all, I have unbounded conceit of my own judgment about the things I feel I see clearly.

Queer, queer fellows we all are. Must be fun for the bigger fellows that hide in the clouds and watch us.

Yours — and I'd like to hear how you are.

E. R. S.

The letters show his increasing preoccupation with pen and ink. He might say what he liked about teaching being his real business in life: he took to the writer's trade like a duck to water: —

"Yes, I could do the review, but it might not suit your public. I haven't the habit of that sort of judicial tone, so called and considered, which consists in thinking one man about as good as another, and in showing wherein everybody is mediocre and not quite so excellent as somebody else (who would in turn be proved mediocre if being reviewed). . . ."

"I would rather take a hand in a collection

of French translations than German, for my part. For I am coming to believe the Germans an unpoetic people — even their greatest poets are pretty wordy and dull and clumsy. But there is a school of modern French poets worth translating. I have been doing some of Sully Prudhomme, for instance. It is — to the Germans — as cloud-fluff to cheese. Or as the violin to the horse-fiddle. . . .”

He continued the argument in a graceful essay in little for the “Atlantic”: —

“Perhaps the best topics on which to feel the difference are those two immemorial inspirers of song, war and love. When the German poet sings of war, it is with the solemnity of Korner’s ‘Gebet Während der Schlact.’ When the French poet sings of it, it is with the ‘Gai! Gai!’ of Béranger. In the one, you hear the heavy tread of men, a dull, regular beat, which, after all, is not very distinguishable to the ear, as to whether it be an advancing column or a funeral march. In the other you hear only the bugles ringing and shouts of enthusiasm and excitement.

“In their treatment of love there is even sharper contrast. The German word *liebe* has quite a different atmosphere of suggestion from the French *amour*. The German poet sings of love and home; you feel that there is at least



a possibility that the passion of to-day will outlast the year, or the years. Constancy is one of its very elements. When the French poet sings of love, it is very delicate, rosy, beautiful, but we do not hear of home."

"Am hurried just now. Have a manuscript story of an author-in-posse to examine and (I fear) to criticise to pieces, an article to write for the 'Pall Mall' . . . and a book to review for the 'Nation,' which they have just sent me: besides being awfully in arrears in correspondence. The spirit of writing letters has not moved my ink-waters for a long while. My friends (few enough at the best) must all be disgruntled at my silence. — is the best man about that. He writes without regard to my sins of omission. He knows I don't change my *animus* with my *cælum*. . . ."

". . . I am suspicious of eccentric people, as a rule, moreover. And the fag end of a famous family is never wholly satisfactory: the beginnings of good blood are better than the thin lees. Each generation pours fresh water on the same old tea-leaves of genius, and it gets very weak. . . . Did you ever look at Galton's 'Faculty'? Interesting book. . . . He gives some copies of composite photographs. I have been trying lapping one over another with the stereoscope and it works beautifully. . . . McGahan's 'Campaign against Khiva' is a

good book to read at some odd moments, for distracting the mind. I've taken to travels again lately. . . . I am in the midst of George Sand's 'Histoire de ma Vie.' You must read it. It is great. We have to take her right in. She is a beautiful mugwump. Decidedly you must get up your French.

"This man Flaubert I must find out more about. If George Sand (at sixty-two) loved him so much at sixty-five, he must have been something.

"I like to find in such histories, that people can love when they are sixty, or seventy, or eighty. It is all *life* till love goes."

Random flashes of self-disclosure light up the letters, and a few passages here and there show his moods toward the end of 1884: —

"Heweis's 'Musical Memories' has a number of good things: among others account of Wagner's Trilogy — descriptive, not so deep as most of 'em. Oh, the idiots that write about great men — we idiots? *Horrendum!*

"*Derelictum* — but I have n't yet looked into Morley on Emerson. I do so hate all I see about 'most anybody. Let a man write about himself. It's the only fellow he knows anything about. . . .

"... I want to write to you about a lot of things, but I hate to use pen and ink. An Eng-

lishman is said to have invented an addition to the telephone which writes out your message for you on paper. Why not every fellow talk his article or letter into it, and not use pen? We're coming to it — but 'slowly, slowly,' and we 'wither on the shore' (if that's it). *Browning* is great. Ever read his 'Pauline'? Early poem, but things in it. . . .

"I never could see how any one past twenty could reminisce — to other ears, or to their own. The past seems so full of mistakes and follies and infelicities both from the without and the within. — Besides: what need to can the old dead sea fruit — there is always a fresh day ready to pick off the tree Yggdrasill. Time has a kind of tart fresh flavor that I always like when picked fresh — but others may have all the preserves of that fruit. . . ."

The series of letters to Aldrich reveals a growing regard which deepened as the acquaintance went on. Both were poets and craftsmen who loved "the tool's true play." The letter to Holt comes in not inappropriately.

*To Thomas Bailey Aldrich*

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., July 29, 1884.

MY DEAR SIR, — You are very kind to make these suggestions apropos of my returned paper on "Studies." Perhaps I will try to pre-

pare such an article as you have in mind, some day. There is much in what you say concerning better methods in the humane studies. I wish you would yourself write on that. You are no doubt right in refusing this manuscript. I know it is very *true*, but your judgment shakes my faith in its useful or suitable form; so that I shall not send it elsewhere, but try again for you at some future time, unless some one else states the thing better.

I had sent two poems before receiving your note. I shall be doing that from time to time, and wish you to send them back when you don't want them — with the impersonal printed slip; for if I thought you were to be put to the trouble of writing I should not feel free to send.

You understand, I don't send my things about. I have, to be sure, sent to the "Century," rarely; in fact they have a weak sonnet of mine now whose appearance I have been dreading monthly for half a year or more, and which I ought not to have signed. And I give the "Overland" something, now and then, from patriotism and admiration of Miss Shinn's heroic efforts to keep her magazine afloat out there.

I am rather ashamed of sending you things you don't want, but I have no friendly sage at hand to help me judge of my things, and I can't

tell myself. So I have to send and trouble you.

Thanking you again for your friendliness,

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Oct. 7, 1884.

Will you tell me whether you would rather have more than one poem from a man at a time, or not? I mean if they are acceptable poems. That is to say, do you like to have on hand accepted poems in advance from a writer of so small fame as myself, or not? If I knew what the supply was, I should be able to judge for myself; but really I have always been at a loss to know what you would prefer. As the "Atlantic" is the only place I really care to print, and as I send very rarely anywhere else, it would be convenient for me to have a hint from you on this point.

Truly yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Sept. 26, 1884.

This picture is true to the great Redwood forests of California. Perhaps it would not seem untrue to the Eastern pine woods, as well. It was pencilled down in the actual forest, though only just now "written."

Yours,

E. R. SILL.



CUYAHOGA FALLS, Oct. 22, '84.

DEAR H——, — I send an article on Emerson, good quotation for these times on one page (leaf turned down). I shall vote for Cleveland, but I don't like such a Hobson's choice. *Vide* November "Atlantic" Contributors' Club for some French translations of mine. I only dared say what I do about *German* poetry under the fiction of a friend who thinks so. I still think a volume of French translations would be a good venture. I shall want to see and read the German one when it is published, for of course I know well enough there is some grand poetry in German.

I will not say anything about Frank's<sup>1</sup> death. As Williams wrote me (announcing it in five lines) "there is nothing to be said." These things are getting to seem "life" to us now — which once looked to be something different.

Ever yours,

E. R. SILL.

<sup>1</sup> Francis E. Kernochan, founder of the Red Room Club in New York, from which grew the University Club. If there was any sort of honest man that, at the outset of his college life, Sill liked less than any other sort, it was the polished New Yorker, and Kernochan was this *ad unguem*, and there never was a better gentleman. Sill grew to appreciate him, and he, William H. Fuller, the well-known art connoisseur, who died in New York about 1895, and Stanford Newell, U.S. Minister to The Hague at the time of the First Conference and a member of it, were the classmates probably next to those often mentioned in the text in intimacy with Sill.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Nov. 27, '84.

MY DEAR EDITOR, — I send one other version of the sonnet, and the *final* one, I promise you. I did not quite like the "Château in Spain," for while its mood was congruous enough if one understood her to say it with some bitterness, — which would account for such a colloquial phrase, — this might be too much of a subtlety for the hasty reader, and we must suppose all our readers to be hasty?

It would be a fine retort to make to me — "*Allons donc*, oh, come now! when you get your things to suit you send them, but don't bother me so much." I will understand it to be made, and try to be better in future.

I enclose a fresh sonnet as apology for this note. Take either version of the other, or send back both that and this if you like.

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

"I like the anonymousness of the Contributors' Club. Would you not as soon print poems for me unsigned? . . . I like very much this hammering at a poem when (as has too seldom happened) I have a criticism that is worth anything, to suggest it to me.

"I should like it if I could talk over poetic forms with you, by word of mouth, sometime."

He opens the year 1885 with a dithyrambic outburst on the weather and the landscape, shot through with his ineradicable scientific curiosity — this time about the reasons for the cylindrical structure of ice formations on the branches and twigs of trees: —

Jan. 18, 1885.

It would be the greatest Christmas card you ever saw if I could send you a look at our world this morning: mercury,  $1^{\circ}$  below zero; ground, *no* ground at all — but a sheet of ice-crusted snow everywhere; every shrub and tree a little cylinder of ice. The sun is on it now, and the wind wags everything (not “waves,” because all is stiff in the ice-armor. It is strange to see the awkward swaying of the elm-boughs, as if drunk, and staggering about), and everything glitters, with points of fire — cold fire (like Tennyson’s stars, in “Maud”) that comes and goes incessantly. Why am I not out looking at it? Because I went out and fed my chickens, put hot water in their frozen crock, got straw from the barn and filled one end of their day-house, as foot-warmer for them, stared around awhile, and got enough of it. Zero weather nips the human nose and ears, when these have been mollified by ten years of California and more.

C. F. (the same that I was writing this

morning — for it is still Sunday, Jan. 18, '85 — except that the sun has gone down and taken the glitter with it, though it has left all the ice). It shone hard as ever it could all day, but made no more impression on the ice-armor of the trees than if it had been moonlight. I said this morning, in my state of crude ignorance, that each twig was surrounded by a cylinder of ice. I have taken two walks since, one of them into the woods down the river, and know more than I did — like the boy that the mule kicked. I find that the ice has made a cylinder on the *top* of each lateral (or slanting) twig, fastened to it along a narrow line only. That is to say, the twig is more than two thirds free of the ice. On vertical twigs and branches, it is on the leeward side. It is a case for Professor John Le Conte. I cannot understand it. The ice-cylinder is one-fourth inch diameter on one-eighth inch twigs. Little terminal clusters of maple buds have small globes of ice around them. Any weed that has pendent seeds or berries left, has now diamond drops. The grasses that stick up through the crusted snow (all glairy like ice) have ice-cylinders on the leeward side, sometimes one-fourth inch on mere threads, and always attached only by a line on one side, occasionally even skipping for a little space, and not touching the grass. Some grasses stand up thus [sketch] broken and pendent.



The ice has made long drops on every thread and seed. One field of delicate weed-stuff (dried and frozen, left standing from last fall) was a wilderness of glitter — a mimic “glittering heath” of Morris’s “Sigurd.” All this ice-work, by the way, is perfectly pure, transparent crystal. You know how finely divided an elm’s ultimate twiglets are, when bare? Imagine each one sheeted in this crystal and every one a separate thread of white fire in the sun, and glittering in the wind. One street is set alone with such elms, arching over into maples on the other side, and you can picture the vista it makes. If you meet Dr. John, . . . ask him what he makes of horizontal icicles, laid along the tops of twigs, just touching them.

It is curious to see how much the matter of signature — that is, of publicity, bothered Sill in his writing. He was perhaps supersensitive, unduly self-conscious; but if that is granted, the reason doubtless lies not so much in his temperamental “skinlessness,” as in the nature of the writing into which he found himself drawn. There was no solid block of work — biography, history, treatise or textbook — set or suggested to him. He found a demand and a market for one sort of thing, fortunately or not, the lyric and the personal essay. He was thrown back upon himself: he must perforce



“look in his heart and write.” To keep his countenance he would fain keep hidden so far as he might. His excuse for preoccupation with the matter is complete, “but if writing or printing verse is a serious or important matter at all, of course this is serious and important to me.” He writes to Aldrich: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Jan. 20, 1885.

MY DEAR SIR, — May I ask you about a very personal matter. You know it is a common experience that men have some mood — either a thing that properly belongs back somewhere in past years, and recurs as a memory, or one that pounces suddenly in on a life where it does n’t belong, and goes again — a mood that he expresses in verse — perhaps exorcises by doing so. He does not wish to put his name to any such thing, and have his tailor or his dentist confer with him about it the next day, and yet it may seem a thing that is human enough to be worth putting in print. Why should not a man therefore assume a *nom de plume* (*plume de vie*) to be used for certain writing? As if Mr. Dick in “David Copperfield” had signed his sane writing “Dick,” and his accounts of Charles I’s head “lunadick.”

You said you did not wish to print in the “Atlantic” any anonymous poems (by the way, I should like much to see more ones there

since you told me of your own relation to them).

It may be said — but a man would be in danger of printing (or offering for print) things that he would have made better if his own name were to go with them. No, I think not. If he had a permanent mask he would be more sensitive about this even than his own proper face, and would do his best for it.

I wonder if this is not done more often than people suspect.

For example, I send three things, signing a name I have evolved from my inner consciousness. And one with my own name. If you can find a leisure moment, sometime — at your convenience — will you tell me what you think about this matter of the mask?

The poems, of course, may come back without your being at any trouble about them, if they do not seem available.

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Jan. 25, 1885.

MY DEAR SIR, — Let me add a word about the mask or "*nom de guerre*" question. It has just occurred to me that you may be under the impression (as I find a number of acquaintances are) that I have published a volume of poems. The little collection which I privately

printed two years ago was noticed among some "recent poetry" in one or two magazines (though I did not send them anywhere for review) and so the impression got abroad that it had been published. Now, if you supposed me to have thus claimed a place among the poets and failed to get it, you might possibly interpret my wish to print poems over a mask name, as that most absurd of things — the effort to retrieve under a mask, a failure of the open face. No, it is far from being that ridiculous motive — impossible in any case, as I have never made any effort to make my own name known. (I did publish a small volume when a boy — of poor stuff — out of print years ago.)

My motive is what I mentioned to you before; and another thing — half fantastic you might think it — which cannot be very well explained to any one at present. Pardon me for thus forcing my personal affair on your time and attention. But if writing or printing verse is a serious or important matter at all, of course this is serious and important to me. And your courtesy to me hitherto has tempted me into speaking of it to you.

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

Meantime a matter of larger moment looms up. Holt asks if he would consider returning to

the academic world under conditions which surely at an earlier day would have made the strongest of appeals to him; namely, to teach English at Yale. There is no evidence that the Yale authorities were behind the question. Mr. Holt has no recollection that they were. It was only a desire on the part of a friend of the man and the institution to see them together. But now it probably seemed to Sill too late. He states his own reasons; behind what is said we may discern signs of the conflict then raging between the "scientific" and the "humanistic" wings in the faculties of American colleges. Sill was probably wise in wishing to avoid that strife. As to the "plain duty" to which he refers, that appears to have been the obligation to watch over the health of one of the members of the household.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Jan. 23, '85.

DEAR HENRY [HOLT], — Yours of the 21st received. Thank you for answer to my question.

As to whether I would accept a certain offer, if made: — there would be two very serious obstacles. First, that I am not the man, in several important respects, to fill the place well. I know the sort of man it requires, and I am not the one. Second, that I could not leave here at present. My plain duty is right here

and it would never do to run away from it. Very good of you to think of such a thing. . . . A man for that place should be picked out by his enemies, not his friends. There is a great opportunity there.

As ever,

Yours.

A few days later he writes again: —

“Neither ought I to give you the impression that the religious question is my only reason for not encouraging any effort to have me selected at Yale for the vacant chair. . . . Again, I would be sorry if I had made you suppose that I am one of those bull-headed enthusiasts who wishes to foist his own hobby into every company. I remember one of my students, since graduating, giving me warm praise for the delicacy I had seemed to show in respecting the religious points of view of my classes, always.

“But, on the other hand, you cannot, of course, realize (till you have come to teach the subject) how all our best literature in this century — and a good deal of it in the last century — dips continually into this underlying stream of philosophical thought, and ethical feeling. ‘In Memoriam,’ for example, is one of the poems I read with my senior classes. You may discuss its rhythms, its epithets, its meta-



phors, its felicities and infelicities of Art, — you are still on the surface of it. The fact is that a thinking man put a good lot of his views of things in general into it — and those views and his feelings about them are precisely the ‘literature’ there is in the thing. And the study of it, as literature, should transfer these views and feelings straight and clear to the brain of the student. . . . So of ‘Middlemarch,’ or ‘Romola.’ Or Hume’s ‘Essays.’ Or ‘Faust,’ or ‘Manfred,’ or Renan’s ‘Souvenirs de l’enfance.’

“The more you think of it, the more you will come to see that the moment you drive the study of literature away from the virile *thought* of modern men and women, you drive it into the puerilities of word-study, and mousing about ‘end-stopt lines’ and all that.”

The allusion to Yale in this letter to Holt evidently led his mind back to California, and he lets out vigorously at the politics and narrowness of the place: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, March 22, '85 (?).

DEAR H —, — Yours of the 15th was received yesterday. I am sorry to hear you have to look out for your health at all. No doubt a few weeks of change will make you all right again. My own prescription for nervous

dyspepsia would be a couple of months of roughing it in the hills, say in California; but perhaps it would not suit everybody. A New Yorker would perhaps be unhappy without his accustomed conveniences, and so defeat the end. For it is necessary to be a little happy, I suppose, to really cure dyspepsia. I shall hope to get good news from you after you have been free from business awhile.

Language chiefly conceals thought, and as of old I never find that a letter has given much light, on any complex subject, to my correspondent. I think we would probably agree more nearly than a correspondence (epistolary) would ever indicate, as to Yale College, *et alia*.

Perhaps I gave you the impression (not that it's any matter) that my leaving the University of California was caused wholly by the religious question. In fact this was only one vexation out of many. My heart was very much set on two or three matters of university progress, and things turned so as to defeat them. For instance, I was interested (and am) in the education of women. I wanted to make co-education a complete success, and to that end wanted to cut off a class of silly girls who had no preparatory attainments and no particular purpose, and who kept swarming in on us as "specials" or "partial course" students. Then the last straw was . . . which made the

position of any self-respecting professor intolerable. The others stuck, liking their seats and salaries (\$3000 a year we had); but I let that go in with a certain lack of physical tone to determine me to resign.

He might easily have been thinking of Holt and the rest of that loyal group of Yale classmates when he wrote: —

“How perpetually true it is that we never learn anything new about anybody when we have summered and wintered him in college! I guess that’s the chief good of a college course — to know a few types right down to bedrock. (It’s a good sign as to the complex value of a college education, that we are always finding some new thing that is the ‘chief good of a college course.’)

“Have I remarked to you a few hundred times that I have discovered that no one has a friend except college people? Business men who never went to college never have such a thing as an intimate friend. Don’t know what the word means.”

Partly as a result of writing his opinions of French literature, — and then questioning them, — he began reading French furiously and would have his friends do the like.

“Really you’ll have to get up your French

and read George Sand's 'Autobiography.' . . . The only refuge for you from the whizzing of the brain along one track, is in reading French. Really I don't know how I could have tided over certain days and nights I have had, . . . if I had n't had a French story to read. You see there are n't any more good English stories, and you have to read the French ones. There never were many of the kind I mean — where the plot, and a certain snap about the dialogue, lead you along page after page. The French stories keep a mature mind going, just as English ones do a child's mind. George Sand, or Dumas père, takes my mind along just as Dickens used to when I was a boy. I confess that in the case of Dumas there is not so much residuum as in the case of Dickens — it all goes in at one ear and out of the other — but who cares? The thing is to drag the mind away from its pizens, and keep it away long enough to recuperate a little. . . . If I spell 'favour' it's perhaps because I have been reading French lately. Though I always did prefer those *u* spellings, a little — while despising such questions too much for thinking much about it. I have a vague sense that words have a family pride in their true origin, that may as well be respected. As if a word should say to a person who spells it in its derivative entirety: 'Oh, who is this that knows the way I came?'

Somehow, there are several of the Websterisms, or Americanisms, that jar on me as indicative of not knowing the way they came — or much else.”

The publicity which attends most writing, especially that of the magazine writer of poems and occasional articles, continued to annoy and vex him. It crops up in various letters, first in a casual manner: —

“More and more I wish all literary work was anonymous. These people who are madly tearing around after a reputation, and these people (worst of all) who assume that *we* are — *that* is the really appalling thing. . . . I wish they would n’t always ‘say something’ if a body send some printed thing. . . .

“Don’t tell any such thing about what I write anonymously to any one with a penchant or opportunity for newspaper ‘personals,’ ever. I dread them exceedingly. I had an offer lately to be personalized, which really scared me. The safest way is not to tell anybody, till things are a year or two old and no longer of interest. . . .

“... Her interest in things outside of relation to her seemed rather fictitious. It is a horrible penalty to pay for fame and flattery. I more and more believe the only way for ordinary mortals is to keep out of sight, and



write anonymously. Why not? It seems to me I should like a man very much, who, having gained a good reputation, went on doing better and better work, 'smiling unbeknownst.' He would like to succeed first and *then* do it to make it clear to himself it was no fear of failure or timidity."

And then he utters it more fully to a friend in California and in more than one letter to Aldrich: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, NOV. 1, — MONDAY.

The trouble about signing one's name to poems is that stupid people (and we are all pretty stupid sometimes) persist in thinking every word literally autobiographical. I have had enough annoyance from that to sicken any one of ever writing verse again, or anything else but arithmetics and geographies. Even then somebody would hate you for your view of the Indian Ocean, or fear the worst about your character because of your treatment of the Least Common Multiple. People are getting to write anonymously now and then. (You did n't write "The Breadwinners," did you? Perhaps the Janitor at the University did — or Bacon the printer, or Henry Ward Beecher.)

As to French poetry, I know there's another side. I believe as I used to, about the

mass of French writers. It's only here and there a George Sand or a delicate poet. As to German — Heine was a Jew of the Jews. You might as well instance Job as a German. A friend of mine calls certain graceful verse “unsubstantial.” It's true much of the French is so.

Your test is the best one: which sticks in the mind. Or as some one puts it, as a test of great writers, whose work has most entered into the world's intellectual life?

Yours,

E. R. S.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., April 10, 1885.

BUT, MY DEAR MR. ALDRICH, — Don't you see the difficulty in the way of my printing such poems as that “Tempted” over my own name, — I a staid citizen, the husband of one wife, as saith the Scripture, the model for ingenuous youth, the sometime professor of coeducated young men and maidens, and all that. I tell you there is no comfort for a man the minute he begins to write anything that is an *intimité* or that sounds (whether it is or not) like the voice of any personal feeling or experience beyond the humdrum — no comfort but behind a mask. Print me over a *nom de* goose quill (I have one that pleases me a shade better than the one I suggested before) — and I will

send you some remarkable poems. I cannot be sure what they will be most remarkable for — they may make your hair stand on end and set your teeth on edge by their “sincerity,” but at any rate I would like to try the experiment.

(I have another reason about which I should have to write seriously, if at all, so I will not go into it.)

I like my own name very well, you understand, and have no reason for anything but modest pride in it, and yet — for one reason and another — I don’t care to see it in print; and especially under any sort of genuine poetry. For once, then, let me coax you to put your objection to the pen-name in your pocket — and go write under that brief poem “*Haden Dana*,” and we will see if we will not fool the world into believing he is a poet before the magazine is many years older.

Please treat this name as confidential, whether you consent to be god-father to it or not.

Very sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., April 18, 1885.

DEAR MR. ALDRICH, — I know that such poems are “dramatic” and that no one has a right to pin a feeling or thought down to a particular origin in fact — yet some one will always do it, and that some one the very one you

would prefer not. It is n't the great public one fears, it is the some ones.

Browning with his "fifty men and women" has a right to step out of any personal accountability for their utterances, yet don't we know after all, that most that is good for anything is autobiographic in one sense or another? If you ever do write the *Reflections of the To-be-hanged*, I, for one, shall never be able to avoid the dim suspicion that you have murdered some one in your dreams, or been mad enough to do it.

You need not fear my being too "candid" for your taste, unless my own taste should suffer some change, or give way before some strain at present unforeseen. I am pretty deeply impressed, myself, with the truth that there are plenty of things "worthy of sacred silence." The indecent exposures of the small poets and poetesses are frightful. The poetesses are the worst, I believe. I hardly know a magazine at home or abroad, except the "*Atlantic*," that has not printed things that offend a nice instinct of silence.

As to names, "*Haden*" had not struck me as an "album word." It was familiar to me from the noted etcher, and suggests rather *Haddam* and *haddock*, etc. But I trust your sense and abandon it gladly. *Wilson Dana* somehow has long spindling legs in my imagination, and an

unkempt beard, and has something to do with patent medicine, or pills; I can't tell where he gets the association. If "*Andrew Hedbrook*" seems to you a good sort of fellow, will you take him?

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

Andrew did seem to Aldrich a good fellow and under this cloak Sill wrote with increasing ease and freedom. He was soon apologizing for his too frequent appearance in the "*Atlantic*," where, however, neither editor nor readers ever found him unwelcome.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., May 11, 1885.

EDITOR ATLANTIC, —

DEAR SIR, — My friend Andrew omitted to enclose stamps with a bit of dramatic dialogue sent to-day. He takes the opportunity to slip in another small poem — not expecting you to keep all he sends, but wishing you to have the best of what he writes, and believing you are the best judge of that.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

Surely it can have happened only rarely in the history of our fledgling literature that a poet-contributor has been so fortunate as to



have a poet-editor with whom, in the craftsman spirit, free from thought of self-interest, he could discuss details of rhythm and assonance, and sense and sound: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., May 27, 1885.

DEAR MR. A——, — Or is one of these better? (In the “Dead Letter” near the end, it should read: “Its white ghost in the ash” instead of “*the* w. g.,” etc., as perhaps I wrote it.)

I am sorry to make you read so much manuscript. I hope you are a very patient man.

A patient poet once received  
So many manuscripts, he grieved,  
And cried, O choke for me, I beg,  
This goose that lays the daily egg!

A. HEDBROOK.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., June 9, 1885.

DEAR MR. A——, — It occurs to me after mailing the proofs of the “Hermione” lyrics and Shakspere: —

1. The prose has too much title. Omit “Interlude” and leave it “An Imag. Conver.,” etc.

2. I altered the couplet near the beginning not wantonly to make more printers’ work, but because I remembered that it might betray the author, as it stood, to one person. If I am to be

"anon," I prefer not even to have my left hand know what my right hand doeth.

3. In the first lyric I changed "blest" to "dear" to avoid rhyming with the last word of the stanza before.

4. Would it not be well for you to alter spelling of "stepped" (3d stanza, 1st lyric) to "stept," so as to rhyme to the eye as well as to the ear? Or not.

In the last and least lyric I went back to your suggestion for the last line of first stanza. I am always glad to have suggestions from you.

I tried to get off in a corner to write this note, but the ubiquitous Andrew found me out and insists on my slipping in another thing from him.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., May 31, 1885.

DEAR MR. A——, — By all means print the Shakspeare Interlude unsigned, as you suggest. It would suit me very well to have everything printed unsigned, except those things on which I *nom-de-plume* myself — or any of those, that you are willing to print that way.

If you want a fine poem from Andrew along in the summer or fall, — a really effulgent one, or perhaps some wonderful pyrotechnic prose tale, — you have only to furnish him with a bit of information — namely, this:

where can be found in the United States short of California, a spot in which to spend three weeks (say, of August) where there is either, —

1. Water to boat on,
2. A mountain to climb,
3. A forest to ride in,
4. Pound trout to catch.

And where there are not —

1. Mosquitoes,
2. Empty preserved meat cans, and discarded paper collars strewn the scene.

In other words, a scrap of nature unpolluted by Punch's 'Arry with his "alarums and excursions." In California I lived on the privilege of spending every summer in perfectly wild places, and I feel the ache for it coming on me tremendously. If any man in Boston knows of such a place and will impart the knowledge to you and you will pass it on to Andrew, the gorgeous literary work shall be forthcoming.

I should add that he is forced to count the cost, even to quarters, else he would go to California for what he wants.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

Sill's acquaintance with Aldrich had advanced to the footing where he was now writing him on the most serious subjects in the world — Religion and Getting a Living.

His letter on the first of these subjects should be placed beside one written a little later to Holt, for the two together not only give a fairly good account of the position he had reached but, by recalling that intensely personal and pathetic letter to Holt almost exactly twenty years before when he was agonizing to persuade himself that he did believe in the orthodox creed of his forefathers, show how long a journey he had taken. What a distance he had come since he wrote, "Either Christ was God or He was not. And if He was, we must take what He said as actual truth, not to be twisted or turned aside. . . . Through his name, his sacrifice, and his intercession and *thus alone*, can we inherit eternal life. I seem to see Him standing there . . . with a solemn earnest face looking at you and me . . . and saying . . . 'he that believeth shall be saved — he that believeth not shall be damned.'"

From doubtful hope he had gone to hopeful doubt and sturdy scepticism and content — at moments even aggressive agnosticism, thus summing up in his own experience the religious history of his generation.

June 9, 1885.

DEAR MR. A——, — Do you want to do me a great favor? I don't know in the least what your proclivities (or declivities) are in the way of religious matters, but I am going

to assume that yours are not far away from mine — enough to ask you, if you are naturally in the way of seeing manuscripts, submitted to the firm for publication, to look into an essay I sent them (with some others) entitled “The XIXth Century” — along toward the end of it — and purloin certain pages treating of the Christian Church as a nuisance and fraud — *if* it is likely, otherwise, to be read by some members of the firm (I don’t in the least know who or what they are) — some very conservative, elderly, religious, sensitive, choleric, old-fashioned gentleman with gold-spectacles and high collar, and a pew in church and gold-headed cane — who hates George Sand and Herbert Spencer (by reputation) and loves Joseph Cook. Is there such a fearful catastrophe imminent as that such a man should read my essay and be made really ill by it?

*If* so (understand I know nothing at all about it), will you do me the friendly act to take out three or four pages that may seem very flagrant? There are only a few pages that speak of the church. (It is only the essay on Morals that I really care to get printed, and I believe that would not really hurt anybody’s feelings.)

It is asking a great deal to ask you to look at any manuscripts outside of the ones your own work bring upon you, I know. But I scent



orthodoxy in a note received yesterday from the firm, and it would simply offend an orthodox man — and uselessly, for he never would print it — to read the last part of that “19th Century” essay.

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Nov. 18, '85.

MY DEAR HENRY [HOLT], — I am glad of what you say about the essays, etc. It is extremely agreeable to know that one's old friends still keep one in mind and have a friendly interest in what he is doing. I would be glad to hear from you oftener and to know more in detail about your doings — inner and outer.

As to the college presidency: — I do not feel sufficiently in mid-stream of educational affairs at the East and do not know the younger men likely to be candidates well enough to make any comparative judgment of so much value as that of others more in the midst of things; but I should be very glad to say in any way — public or private — that of all the men I know Mr. Gilman seems to me the best for the place. No one can be more thoroughly convinced than I am that the clerical element is a minor one to Yale College. Whoever is chosen for the head, I hope it will be no clergyman — no “Doctor” of an exploded “Divinity.” In fact so thoroughly

do I feel this that Mr. Gilman seems to me a little too much addicted to the old mythology and observances to be an ideal man for the head of the future college. I should find him a grain better suited to the position if we found him a little more frank and courageous about acknowledging that "it moves" and that it is time for some of the old things to pass away.

But this view is perhaps not shared by the rest of you. You know my feeling that the Christian mythology and the Church grip on society are very hurtful things. They are more in the way of the progress of true ideas about man and life than all other influences put together. Yes, Mr. Gilman, by all means. I don't know any man that *compares* with him for the position. By the way, who are the "half-dozen best men, 'anti-clericals'"? I don't quite like the idea of having this movement toward a national government of Yale "University" and Yale College from New York, as if it were from a coterie or clique. That notion will get into people's heads and damage the movement, if you don't look out. This is a rather large country you know. Harvard is controlled by a provincial clique. It is a Boston concern. But Yale belongs to the country in general. I don't think it was a fortunate thing that an exclusively New York Yale Club was formed *just at this time*. But I may be wrong. Stanford's twenty

million California University may get Mr. Gilman! What then?

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

Like every other author Sill yielded to the enchantment which distance lends to the editorial chair. Well for him and his poetry that he never attained its doubtful dignity!

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., July 30, 1885.

MY DEAR MR. A——, — It was sufficiently overwhelming to find three things of mine in one number of the "Atlantic": and now your friendly praise really scares me. It is a rather delightful way of being scared, I admit, to get such words from a man who holds the place in my estimation that you do; but actually I am afraid I never can do well enough to deserve them. And I don't know whether I shall dare send you any more things, without writing them over forty or fifty times and soaking them down for a year.

Hedbrook here has a bunch of things, but has no courage to send them, at present. And there is a prose lingo about Humming Birds here in my desk. When I get over blushing I will mail some of them, or something else. But I beg of you to treat whatever I send with unrelenting justice of judgment, and send them

back (if you will continue to be so kind as to take that trouble) without thinking it necessary to give any reason but their "unavailability," and that, too, in printed form whenever the spirit does not move you — or time does not allow you — to write.

I wonder if you would not like to have me help in the preliminary sifting of your piles of manuscripts. I seem to lack suitable employment at present, and one cannot be writing either polemics or poetry all the time. I can read manuscript very fast, and I could say very unkind things to the contributors of the worst material. (I should wish to leave it to your peaceful pen to say the kind things.) I've a notion that with proper training from you I could bear a hand somewhere about that work of yours; in its lower regions, at least, as a getter-through of preliminary drudgery.

I thank you most heartily for your encouraging and friendly words to me.

Sincerely yours,

E. R. SILL.

During the summer of 1885 wide interest was excited in the project of Senator Leland Stanford, a California millionaire, to found a university as a memorial to his son, then lately dead. Sill was concerned that the university should deserve the name of a university. He

writes to President Gilman, of Johns Hopkins: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, June 15, '85.

MY DEAR SIR, — Mr. Stanford has been so long shut up to the association with men whose talk is of horses that I think we should be prepared for some pretty low views — I mean shallow, short-sighted, sordid views of life and things; but I should think a man of your persuasive speech and tact in meeting the particular mind in hand on a given occasion, might easily make him see (for I think he has a sound enough judgment, so far as his perceptions and opportunities give him data) that the only *great* things, so far in the world — with great and enduring reputations — and great power in the world — and therefore great glory for the doers or founders of them — have been those that have based themselves on deep and permanent needs of man. No fiddlesticks of an industrial college, or mechanics training school, or Dr. Newman affair — meeting only a newspaper demand, or demagogue demand.

I wish he could realize the tremendous renown and power of Oxford and Cambridge — or of the big German universities, and figure himself as begetting such another. Can't we raise Bishop Berkeley's spirit (where is the witch of Endor?) to inflame him?

What a thing it might be, out there in Cali-



fornia if he only would! To start, you see, free of the old load of accumulated rubbish, and with the advantage of all that has been learned by means of or in spite of this rubbish — It is great.

But you don't need that I should say anything to you on this topic.

I only wish you good speed if you have any opportunities to bring it about.

As ever yours,

E. R. SILL.

PRES. GILMAN, BALTIMORE.

This letter to Holt recalls Sill's essay, "Should a College Educate," which appeared in the "Atlantic" the same month, and doubtless provoked the correspondence: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Aug. 11, '85.

DEAR H——, — I'll tell you just how far it goes (the argument for "studying what one dislikes"). It goes so far as great regions of study are concerned; like mathematics, philosophy, literature. Any man who has taught ten years in any large college knows that mere heredity (and early surroundings) produces acres of students who will not only dislike but hate and despise certain regions of effort and attainment; effeminate weaklings who have a wonderful scorn of all athletics; big brawny fellows who

contemn clean linen and delicate manners; musical temperaments that loathe any kind of hard work whatever; and hard workers who despise all music as effeminate; sons of West Pointers who think all scholarship is worthless; and sons of scholars who hate a military man; sons of civil engineers who can hardly be brought to read and write easy words; and sons of literary men who think mathematics simply devilish torture. You've no idea of the extent of this till you teach a lot of youngsters.

The awfulest fact in creation is this thing of heredity. I've no doubt you know plenty of splendid men who have come through scientific training. The question is how much less — or more — splendid would they be for knowing the *Zeitgeist* of the ancient time as well as that of the present time? Would they be any the less efficient with a wider grasp on literature and the thought of the world outside their specialties? The way to judge how much of the admirable product came from the scientific and illiberal training, is to see how many perfect asses that training produces. Judge by the average product. And study it — as I have done — in the universities where they have both making side by side — the same raw material, the same length of time, but the two contrasted curricula.

Ask yourself this question fairly: How many

people do I know who have learned German and French without being in any sense "educated" persons; how many, on the other hand, who have learned Latin or Greek without being in some sense "educated" persons? Why, nurse-girls and dancing-masters and hack-drivers know French and German better than the Ollendorff college classes do. Does it educate them much?

Then ask the same question as to the natural sciences, and compare with the humane studies, — *literæ humaniores*. Which would do most for a young fellow, an hour with Spencer's "Data of Ethics" or an hour with a clam? Well, the one is philosophy, the other science. And a clam in a book is n't even half so efficacious as a clam in the mud. But our shield has two sides, no doubt.

But I began this only to thank you for your friendly invitation. I am afraid we shall not be able to accept it, for health is the one thing we are after, and we must flee to the mountains after a little sniff of the ocean breeze, somewhere down East where it is cool and bracing. Thank you, too, for the information. Very likely we will try one of the places you recommend.

Pardon my saying so many words on the educational question. I presume you and I would train a boy very much alike after all. I'll confide to you a comical fact (considering which

side I am arguing on). I've spent more effort, ten to one, on getting people interested in the *sciences* I'm interested in, than in the other studies (always excepting modern literature). I never met a boy or girl without setting them at my binocular microscope and getting them to hatch out tadpoles, and dissect chickens' brains, and all that. And I have always worked intensely to get young and old to read Spencer, Darwin, etc. My own private bent is toward natural history.

The late summer saw the Sills at Gloucester, where their visit was long remembered by a few, at least. The cottage where they "camped out" was beside the sea, and faced the beautiful lava gorge where the tide rose almost to the piazza. They were both enthusiastic walkers and found the Gloucester Downs a constant delight: —

"We are having a run on to the seaside for 'health.' . . . I wish you could see the Atlantic as it comes in on the rocks here on Cape Ann. I think the Pacific is never quite so fine, at least on any shore I have seen out there. . . . I wish you could see (and share) the queerness and prettiness of the place. We watch the fishing boats — sails of all sizes and shapes — flitting out to sea and in again. It is a much *livelier* harbor than San Francisco Bay, and

has so much more *life* color, though not so fine sky and earth colors."

On his return to the West, Sill saw Mr. Aldrich in Boston. Unfortunately he was very unwell, in consequence of an accident in Gloucester, so that the meeting to which he had looked forward eagerly was marred. Apparently the chance for a longer talk never came.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Oct. 13, 1885.

MY DEAR MR. A., — Can you not tell Mr. Stedman (if his book is not yet beyond proof-correcting) that one, at least, of the "twilight" poets, namely, "Sill," would much prefer to be left out of his enumeration? He had me in his "Century" article. I am not a publishing author (the booklet of verses of which I think I sent you a copy — "The Venus of Milo," etc., was never published, and never will be), and so might escape being stuck in his catalogue, like a fly on a pin. Don't you think?

I enclose a few things. I am embarrassed sometimes to know whether I have sent you something before or not. If I ever send a poem again that you have sent back to me, I beg you to forgive me and lay it to a mere mischance. I certainly mean not to. But I hate to burn the confounded little things up, sometimes, and they are liable to get misplaced.



It was a great pleasure to me to see you a few minutes. I had some things I wanted very much to talk to you about, and get your advice on (not manuscript), but I was too unwell to do it then.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

The "sanctum mottoes" mentioned below have disappeared, but "the following" — a scrap of verse—seems worth preserving:—

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Oct. 15, 1885.

DEAR MR. A—, Andrew thinks it is necessary for me to add (but of course it is n't) that the sanctum mottoes are not for the magazine but for the editor, in reminiscence of a too-too brief visit. And as I am writing he must needs put in the following.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

*To a Face Contradictory*

Two soft blue, warring eyes: one looks at me  
With lid a little drooping, wistfully.

The other, wider open, does not fear,  
And will not hope, but watches to see clear.

One hints of love; the other does not hate:  
One tells me "come"! the other warns me, "Wait!"

The voice, at least, is single. *That* I trust,  
Because, — because I *do*, because I *must*.

Shut, riddling eyes! or in the dark I'll woo,  
And my one voice shall speak and tell me true.

ANDREW HEDBROOK.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Nov. 28, 1885.

MY DEAR MR. ALDRICH, — The Lord send you patience and a forgiving spirit if I trouble you too much about my things; but I want anything you use to be as good as possible, — and so: —

In the last stanza but one of the *Sister of Mercy*, — “For touch of human company.” Should it be “sympathy” instead of “company”?

And should this stanza be inserted next? (referring to the old people)

“I know the thoughts they never speak,  
When children bring the birthday flowers.  
The (scanty) silent tears that burn the cheek,  
While night-bells strike the dragging hours.”

And should “his” be changed to “thy” in the first stanza? (I thought, in writing it “his,” she might be supposed to turn from *thoughts* of him to addressing *him*.)

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

Always feel free to substitute for any accepted thing any later thing if you like it better, and reject the other.

His casual letters at the period are full of flashes of comment about books and writers: —

“George Eliot says, “‘Henry Esmond’ is a disagreeable story at the end — because he was in love with the daughter all through the book and then married the mother at the last’ — yet I think it seems all right, as one reads it. Who would have had him marry the other, knowing her?

“The orthodox people will not like things George Eliot says in her letters, and they will try to frown her down. But they will not succeed. She was great, and good too. Let them cast stones who are better. She was clear-headed and rational, that’s all; and had that faith in the Divine Wisdom that makes one feel sure the true is — in the long run — the safe and good. . . .

“... I’m making acquaintance with another Frenchman I like: Balzac. He sticks some sharp and deep probes into the human heart. Like Thackeray, he makes one wonder ‘if he means me.’

“I go with you entirely about St. Matthew’s poetry, and the Greek of it. ‘How he *does* it’ is by *being* that way, I suppose. But perhaps he is an example of the educational effect of keeping one’s mind constantly in contact with the choicest of everything. Think what a

hodge-podge of influences most of us tumble around in, all our lives.

“ . . . This getting up in the morning wrong foot foremost is one of the chief ills of life. More fun overnight is what would keep us from it. But the prescription is like port wine and peacocks’ tongues to the beggar. Going to bed *early* is sometimes a safeguard. I wish you’d write a magazine essay about the woes and wants of children, such as you speak of in that connection. It would do good. Parents don’t *mean* to be mean; they need light. . . .

“I have come to feel a good deal your disrelish of poetry. A friend of mine writes to me that he lately said, ‘I always despised it; I believe I am coming to hate it.’ He was thinking of the value of hard facts. But every now and then, at an odd moment, I feel that all the old charm of it: ‘Das ew’ge, alte Lied’ — (remember that poem of Anastasius Grün in ‘Golden Treasury of German Song’?).

“ . . . Almost thou persuadest me to be a pessimist. . . . And we shall not be very bad pessimists (not *pessimi pessimistorum*) while we admit that after all it is worth living, for us, and worth *trying* for, for the future comers.

“This world is not out of the woods yet by any means. — Meantime I hope you are keeping your soul as tranquil as circumstances will permit: taking the bird’s-eye view, as medi-

cine, before each meal — and hearing, whenever you wake up in the night, that ‘sentinel’ who goes his rounds ‘whispering to the worlds of space’ ‘peace.’ — One must not expect to do very much more than the average. . . . It’s a kind of greediness that circumstances always conspire to cure us of.”

Sill’s own soul was not tranquil, particularly when he thought of college and of Yale especially. He writes with becoming candor to Holt, who, however he may have felt then, it is plain from a reading of the passages on Sill’s college life, came to have very much the same opinion as Sill about their *alma mater*: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Dec., ’85.

DEAR H——, — I might add as postscript that I consider it perfectly impossible to get Gilman made president of Yale. They would not do it even if there were no theological animus involved. And with that it is as if you should propose Bismarck or Herbert Spencer. Dwight will be president, and a pretty president he will be! Gilman may be an ordained “minister,” but they know well enough that he would not consider the religious test in getting his faculty, and *that* is the *unum necessarium* in New Haven. The only possible hope would be to scare them into the idea that a big rival



university was being projected, on advanced ideas. And why should n't it be for a fact? Probably you do not share my contempt for Yale College as an apparatus of liberal education. I have but a very feeble interest in it, or hope of its ever being anything but a sort of old woman's college, — a nunnery of the church.

Christmas found Sill in a rather sombre frame of mind from which he tried with but imperfect success to rouse himself by jocular communication to his California friends: —

“Don't you rather reluct at writing these last dates of the year? The illusion is strong upon us that it really is a dying away, bit by bit, of one more set of opportunities — possibilities — liveabilities — a sort of annual mystery, or Passion Play, of the End of Life. Then we slip over the ridge-pole into Jan. 1, 2, etc., and begin to go down — faster and faster — and forget the old days behind. — We wish each other ‘merry’ Xmas; how merry do we succeed in being? Somebody has been editorializing that we have no business to wish people, or be (except children) ‘merry.’ I deny his overwise assertion. ‘We’d *ought*’ o’ be merry. I can conceive a considerable number — or sets — of circumstances that could slide into this moment and make me merry. Could n't you

as to *your* self? I was merry for two minutes and a half this morning, when —— related the anecdote of the boy whose mother caught him in a lie, and tried to impress the story of Ananias on him. He had an idiot brother named Melchisedek. ‘How that story would have scared Melchisedek!’ quoth the boy, ‘It don’t scare me a bit!’

[On the back of a Christmas card, representing a woodland stream]: —

“This is the bank whereon the wild Time blows  
Where poor professors might forget their woes —  
Where they their wiser faculties might find  
By leaving their unwiser Faculties behind.  
Thither, O Dean, oh! thither let us flee,  
And build no more a U-ni-vers-i-tee;  
We’ll lie at ease, all quiet, calm, and cool,  
And yes — we’ll have to have our little school,  
Line upon line — O, it will be too utter!  
Our little schools of fishes fried in butter!”

Would it have been better if Sill had had his wish and become an editorial worker? Probably not. He was too much an individual and too finely organized for the endless routine of the desk: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Dec. 27, 1885.

DEAR MR. A——, — Put this sheet away till a moment of (comparative) leisure; for it is not regular business pertaining to manuscript.

Take it with a cigar — It often occurs to me after reading the "Atlantic," to comment on some article; to make an inquiry of a writer; to criticize some statement, or opinion; or to further it by an additional fact or suggestion. I am moved to write a note to the writer. In such a case I think of the Contributors' Club; but reject the idea, thinking the matter too small; or across the line toward "newspaper" matter, rather than "magazine" matter; or too brief.

Many other readers must occasionally have the same experience. Why not, therefore, have a weekly supplementary "Contributors' Club," or "Bric-A-Brackish" issue — published in "Atlantic" color and shape — a kind of supplement — or "Party call" — or "Staircase Wit" or "Mother Carey's Chicken," hovering around the stern of the big ship. A place to put choice odds and ends: the broken food that is too good to be thrown away, but not good enough (or *large* enough, rather) to put on the table next time. A place where the most elephantine contributor might gambol a little. Where Miss Thomas's sprites might "tread a light cinque" — if that's what they did.

Everybody must feel (at least I do — do not you?) the crying need of a weekly literary publication that shall be *recherché* instead of promiscuous. As good as the "Nation" in that

respect, only purely literary. See what we have: The "Literary World," sort o' Philistine, heavy, "more geniality than light" in its atmosphere. (What a devilish — literally — good thing that was of the "Nation" critic's on Howells's Harper début! Who did it?) Praising everybody and everything — a "mush of concession"; the "Critic," very bright but Bohemianish and — what?

What a good place to train an editor under your eye and hand — in this "Sub-Atlantic"! Could you not find goodish raw material in Andrew Hedbrook for such a place? But this is truly only an afterthought. The opportunity for the *thing* was my first idea.

Wishing you a most happy New Year,

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

The scraps to Aldrich and the unnamed correspondents do not merely disclose Sill's modesty, which was genuine and deep, but hint at the spiritual unrest which seized him at times and was due in no small measure to a feeling of isolation: —

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Feb. 5, 1886.

DEAR MR. A——, — I have no idea I am always able to just "hit it," but I send pretty freely, hoping you will never try to *make your-*

*self think* a thing of mine is good, but will throw out whatever "*strikes*" you as dubious.

Thank you for the friendly suggestions as to "collected poems." I shall certainly take advantage of your kind offer and advise with you if the time comes. But I must try to have something better worth while, first.

I am glad you are going to Europe and wish I were going too. Go early and stay late! — The opposite of Charles Lamb's procedure. But I shall miss your occasional notes — unless some rainy day you will send me one from over there, which I should greatly like. But I'm afraid the very address would recall only manuscripts and the daily task.

It does not cease to make me abashed and blushful to find so many things of mine in the magazine. I only wish I could send things of a quality up to the level of my aspiration.

You have my heartiest wishes for a merry vacation and safe return.

With the summer of 1886, Sill added a new correspondent to his list, to whom he had been drawn sympathetically by some distresses of mind or body from which she was suffering and he wrote her a series of letters full of good cheer and gayety — some of it, especially the last let-



ter, written four days before his death, touched with true heroism.

The drama draws toward its close, all unsuspected by Sill or his friends, but none the less endowing these last letters with a peculiar interest, because they are the last and because they stop so suddenly and untimely: —

CUY. FALLS, July 21, '86 — MONDAY.

What color are your eyes? Are they witch-hazel? In [that] they seem to have some touch of the divining rod. If I should tell you I wrote "Individual Continuity," then you could not tell anybody you did n't know — and how can anybody keep anything from anybody unless he can tell them "I don't know." Or do you make metaphysical distinctions as to certain-sure knowledge, and are you capable of saying you don't know, with the agnostic mental reservation that there don't nobuddy know nothing? If I should say I did n't write it, then you *surely* could n't say you did n't know whether I did or not. Now the tree of knowledge is well known to be the tree of sorrow. Blessed be them as knows nothing. Besides, I don't know as anybody can know for sartin sure whether (interrupted at this point and the blots mean that somebody left my fountain pen wrong end up, and so — . Do you use an "Ideal Fountain Pen"? They can furnish you one that will just

exactly suit you) — whether he did or did not write any given thing. Often when I have written a sentence, I say to myself — who said that? In what book did I read that? There's a sentence or two, by the way, in this "Continuity" article (whoever wrote it) that it seems to me I have seen in print before. About nature's police that has (?) our faces in a rogue's gallery. Where have I seen that? I wrote a bit of verse once, "Lend me thy fillet, Love, etc." (you never saw it, I guess), which for a year bothered me because I felt certain I had seen it somewhere. But it has gone around in print and neither I nor anybody else has discovered any predecessor, so far as I can learn. (I would quote some more of it, but I can't recall it.) — So you (no more of that kind of paper) are a great talker? How well we should get on, for I am a great keeper-still. Yet I don't believe in keeping still. I can't agree with George Sand (in "Isidora") that "*Quand l'échange de la parole n'est pas nécessaire, il est rarement utile.*" Unless one add to it that a considerable amount of it is *always* necessary. But I never could talk, myself. I am like poor Josef in George Sand's "Maîtres Sonneurs," who couldn't woo in words, but give him his *musette*. If I could play the 'cello about seventeen hundred times as well as I now play it ill, I might talk with *that*. As to letters they *seem* to take so confoundedly

long to write. It is really no longer than one would be in talking, but being only one end of the telephone in continuous activity, it seems forever. If I could get a fountain pen that held ideas instead of ink, so that I could blow it full in a wink of the eye, and then let somebody else skit it along over the paper, — or if we had that machine which the coming man will have, — he never can be a come man until he does have it, — which shall write as fast as we can think —!

I like what you tell me about your experience with the mind during music. I have never exchanged views on that topic with any one — never heard it mentioned, in fact, and have wondered how it is with others. Some day we will go to a Symphony concert together and I will turn on you in the middle of something and make you tell me what you are thinking about.

Expectant attention won't explain the *word* difficulty when you have come plump upon it unexpectedly and still find it goes wrong. Will it? It is an interesting phenomenon. I wonder if we don't all of us have certain pet mispellings that we never have happened to get eradicated? I spelt "melancholy" with two *ll*'s all my life till about five years ago. Happened to. I think friends ought to be able to pick up such things for us. But they *won't*. They're all

cowards. Yes, in fact all the club things in August "Atlantic" are of my brewing, except the "Threshold Flower" and I wish I had written that. But don't tell. And as to Hedbrook, say you don't know. That answer always sounds modest, about anything. Besides, you *don't*, you know.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Oct.

. . . Have been for a week across the border into Northwestern Pennsylvania, among some wildish baby-mountains with some good woods. . . . Had some good walks in fine dark rugged forest places, and almost could imagine it was California. It makes us sentimental and homesick when that occurs.

After an hour spent in straightening out papers — cleaning up two tables (how they get rattled, these writing-tables, if one does not exercise eternal vigilance!) I sat down to do some "literary" writing—but the spirits refuse to communicate — and it must be letterary, instead. In the process of clearing up I put away a volume of George Sand's correspondence, which reminds me to quote (and translate) a bit of one I was reading last night. "You believe in the greatness of women, and you hold them for better than men. For my part, I don't

think so. Having been degraded, it is impossible that they have not taken the [*mœurs*] morals and manners of slaves, and it will take more time to lift them out of it than it would have been necessary for men to raise themselves. When I think of it I have the spleen; but I mean not to live too much in the present moment. We must not be too much beaten down by the general ill. Have we not affections, profound, certain, durable?"

I might quote also the end of the letter: "Does my laziness about writing discourage you? But you know very well how this frightful trade of the scribbler makes you take a scunner to the very view of ink and paper."

It is the beautifullest early-fall weather to-day. Ah me and ochhone, what a days-that-are-no-more-ishness there is about it. You don't exactly have it in California — the leaves on all the vines have been crying all night and hang all kind o' shamed of it and wilticated — and the sunshine is yellow and still — no more dance in it, though the crickets have piped unto it all the morning. Melons are ripe and grapes, and the coal is being got in — black reminder of the frost bite to come. . . . This weather or sumpthin or other makes me kind o' wishful for a ticket to California.

I am coming to feel that the one sole and only mark and test of a plebeian (where "all



the little soul is dirt") is this sticking themselves forward. And that the only thing necessary to prove a person, to me, a natural nobleman, is the willingness — nay, desire — to stay out of sight and be unannounced. I have a perfect loathing . . . for these people that do this newspaper-puff business about themselves. — And, by the way, I don't like this thing of small poets writing sonnets (signed duly with their small names) to bigger ones. Do you? It's getting common and unclean. And the mutual sonnetteering of the small ones to each other.

Boo'ful autumn days. "The flying gold of the autumn woodlands drift." Soon it will be "rotten woodlands drip and the leaf is stamped in clay." But we won't borrow trouble. . . . It's always pleasant to look forward to winter and think one *may* do some bit of worth-while writing.

CUY. FALLS, Oct. 9, '86.

How am I going to impart, or intimate, or break gently to you the gorgonian fact that I don't more than half like "Diana"? Now why you should like it and I not is the puzzling psychological conundrum. I can throw but two glimmers on it: one, that it is written by a woman; for the man must be a woman in disguise, it seems to me. The other, that you have got used to a certain sort of straining at effect in

language—a kind of visible effort to be original and surprisingly fine in your Boston society.

What about Meredith? Is he really known to be of the male sex? I have never heard a thing about him (her). Perhaps it is only the English (or Irish) view of woman that goes agin me. You see, Diana is after all a kind of quick-witted simpleton. Now I hate quick-witted simpletons.

I don't like the way the book has of blurt-ing out about things that are not meant to be indiscriminately talked about. There is a kind of animalism underlying it all.

What is the good of a novelist who says that somebody went late to the theatre and just in time "to meet the vomit"! Good Lord! And I think the scene between Dacier and Diana in the parlor, where there is the long-drawn-out fuss about kissing and pressing hands and other performances, is silly and sensual, both. If one is going to out with the animal matters, I like them said out frankly and briefly—not sort of dallied with, and slunk away from, and touch and go for a half-dozen paragraphs. Oh, I'm dead sure it is a woman wrote it. No man would have sillied so about the kissing the other lover's (the positively the last lover's) coat sleeve, and forgetting she was tampering with such a fierce and fiery and ferocious and fiddlesticky

brute and tiger and monster of volcanic passions — roused even through a thickness of best Scotch all-wool coat sleeve, plus silesia lining, plus a cotton shirt, plus an originally heavy and fine but somewhat worn and shrunk (owing to incautious washing with soapsuds and being ironed the wrong way of the goods) undershirt.

Now you must admit that it takes a woman novelist to do these things. And I'll tell you why. (Going back on my high views of women? Not a bit of it.) It's because women are so plaguey smart, *they* can write novels — bright ones, too, with power in 'em — without having ever had a vestige of education. A mere man can't do that. And the education saves *him* from writing such stuff when he *does* write.

Oh, come now — I'll admit I read this story with a good deal of interest — and that there are memorable things in it. And I'm going to read another of — *hers*. Which shall it be?

I have n't ventured to write before, because I inferred you were so busy (for I can't but conceive you as pitching in head over heels into the first of a year's work) that I did n't think you'd more than glance at any letter I should write. I, too, have been busy lately. But not so much so but that I shall read every word of any epistle I may get from you.

Yours,

E. R. S.

C. FALLS, MONDAY NIGHT, Oct. 11, '86.

What kind of a woman was Diana to be capable of going off and betraying Dacier's confidential politics to the "Times"? Igit? The reader feels like Dacier — he does n't want to know any more about her. And don't you get tired of hearing that a character was always so brilliant in speech, so dazzlingly witty, — all sparkle and miraculous repartee, — and then when any specimens are quoted (*passim*, along in the book) to find them pretty flat and very labored? *Nascitur ridiculus mus*.

What kind of a style is this: "He must be mad," she said, "compelled to disburden herself in a congenial atmosphere; which, however, she infrigidated by her overflow of exclamatory wonderment — a curtain that shook voluminous folds, leaving Redworth to dreams of the treasure forfeited."

The book has your name on it still, in sign I was to send it back, so I shall not quote, but refer to, the last column and a half of p. 51 and first 1/27 52, to ask if that is witty and vivacious and charming, or — awfully flat and trashy. Do they do that in just that way at Boston parties? If so I'd rather smash my china in the solitude of my chamber.

But how "rammed with" ideas the man is — such as they are. A kind of seething brain — kept feverishly seething, with far-fetched allu-



sions all-jumbled-together comparisons — as if soaked in green tea and genius and stupidity and brandy and tobacco. If I seem to be swearing at things, remember the pen is mightier when he swore.

I would give a dollar and fifteen cents to spend the rest of the evening *talking* with you — about novels and people and a' that. "Lonesome"? You can't be — can you? — in such a crowd of brains and hearts. Or do you "loathe the squares and streets, and the faces that one meets"?

I wish you could have gone to the woods with me this afternoon. Dark with thick oaks — still unchanged of leaf — with clumps of hickory bright masses of solid yellow — as if great wedges of sunshine cleaving the woods. Some western tints that you don't have — Peppridge lieblich red — and the maples that you *do* have — but all the trees a size or two bigger and taller than in any New England woods I have seen. Still, still, so that one hears a leaf drop here, or another there, and then a nut fall, and then a squirrel leap from one tree-top to another. But I would gladly have confided to you "how sweet" the "solitude." Can you get any real companionship out of the beautiful *young* people? or do you find, as I, that the telephone wire crosses an abysm of inexperience on their part, and won't carry.



"Hello! What is life?" (Ans.) "lo — brrrrr — m-m-m-m — zh-zh-zh — brrmmzzzz — bang!" How many times a week do you "go out"?

("Demanding thus to bring relief —  
What kind of life is this I lead?")

What is that quotation? I can't place it, or be sure it's right.

Read "Tartarin sur les Alpes," Daudet.

What a staggering lot of books the publishers turn out on a weary world! What gabblers we are! Gabblers that write, and gabblers that read — for no doubt it's the demand that creates the supply. But oh, for an hour, or a dozen, of good, honest, unrestrained talk — about hens, or buttons, or anything.

Yours heartily,

E. R. S.

CUY. FALLS, Oct. 26, '86.

"What, silent still, and silent all?" You never get mad, do you? And retire to your tent like Achilles? I must Hector you then till you come out and fight. (*Absit omen!* I don't want to be hauled round Boston by the heels.)

*What would you rather study* if you had nothing to do but study, and a serene and comfortable mind to study with? If you were like the old Boy who was always *going* to retire and "read the authors"? — Or — to enlarge

the question — what would you do if you could do just as you were a mind to? —

Questions suggested by my having just struck on a new branch of a favorite line of study with me. Grimm's "Teutonic Mythology." (Late edition by somebody who keeps referring to "Appendix" and then there *is n't* any Appendix.) You've read Max Müller, maybe, and some of his Indian translations? This comparison of Religions — especially the Ancient — when one goes at it with his common sense about him (not "leaving off his wit and going in his — what was it? — doublet and hose"?) — not expecting to find any occult new light, but only new exhibitions of man's perennial cravings, and guessings, and embodyings, and human-life projectings!

Save all your earnings and compel an easier set of circumstances another year: Five pupils somewhere, with three good teachers to each — reporting to you once a fortnight. And I will live next door and keep a Tennis Court. Oh, Yes!

Yours,

E. R. S. ! ! !

C. FALLS, Dec. 7, '86 — TUES. NIGHT.

I am having this oddish experience with regard to you: that the more I know of you the less I know you. But I suppose nobody ever

made anybody out through letters. (And perhaps not in any other way — either!)

We have steam up at last, and the mercury may go down outside to zero (as it has done lately). We keep warm in the house. — I wish I knew what you know. I suppose you know Browning (I have not got hold of your notes yet, to see), but what else? Have you gone into the late-years explorations of old Egypt and Assyria? Have you read the translations in the "Records of the Past," and Bunsen and Birch and Rawlinson, etc.? There is a fascinating difficulty in getting at any facts about the real men and women and their lives, for all the inscriptions and records. It interests me especially as comparative religion and comparative ethics. I want to talk with you about ethics. How do you govern your life, anyway? By two or three amiable feelings, as Sanctissima does, and will have it that we all must or go to perdition? When you have a girl that does n't care what she does, or whether she and things in general go to smash or not, what "why" do you bring to bear on her?

The trouble about the books is the rhetorical flourish of them. Here is Samuel Johnson's new book about the Persian Religion — everything buried under rubbishy rhetoric and fine Bostonese. Lovely to me is the style of the man who just says yea and nay and there leaves

it. Because I have reached an age when I want to know what is the plain truth about things. Which leads me to say I should like (or as an old Yankee friend of mine used always to say — I should admire) to look into that crystal-backed watch of yours. I hear it tick — in your letters. I want to shew wheels go wound. Neither have I read Bagehot's Milton. Must do it. Have read a good deal of Masson's tremendous "Life," have you? For Milton is great, to me. And Bagehot reminds me of Jevons. His memoirs (mostly letters) worth reading, or skimming from one good thing to another. Dry but human. He had a scheme (and tried it for a while) of hiring himself out for two shillings an hour to explore things for people in the British Museum. I wish I had known it! Did you never feel that you'd like to employ a dozen or two people to look up things for you in libraries?

Hochheimer. I don't believe in stimulants for you and me. They are only spurs to the Arabian — who needs only the touch of the naked heel. If you spur to-night, you'll lag to-morrow to pay for it. We'll do more in the long run for keeping the steadier gait.

But friends of "the other sex" — good Lord! why not? People take this matter of sex too seriously. It is only a convenient appliance for regulating posterity. Aside from that (and

pretty much everything *is* aside from that), why should we have it always in mind? Ah, we shall do all that better, one of these fine days!

The dream of the symphony has impressed me a good deal. I am thankful to you for making the effort to put it down in words. I wonder if it is on the surface that we all differ — and whether if we get in among the intricacies of the mind we are all the same. As if we all lived round a mountain — and we take each other in through labyrinthine passages — dim vaults — hollow spaces of shadow — and suddenly, the open heart of the mountains, lighted up and full of music — “this is my heart!” “Why, — this too is mine” — for the centre was common to all.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

This series of letters may be interrupted for two fragmentary notes to old friends in California, the second — to Mr. Palmer — gathering a certain solemnity from being the last message to the Pacific Slope: —

“I think of you as ‘walking alone like the rhinoceros,’ more and more as the years go on. For in face of the almanac, the years do seem to go on — hold back as we may. When I think how long I have been away from Berkeley I



am driven to wonder that I ever hear from any friend there. For Time carries not only a scythe and mows, but a hatchet and splits. A good ordinary quality of love seems to last in this world about a year and a half or two years of absence — a prime quality of friendship from five to seven! Hail, O Time! thou splitter apart of mortals. *Splititandi salutamus!*”

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., January 1, 1887.

I don't like the years to go so. I was not half done with '86. . . .

I read this in Turgenieff's "Raufbold" last night: "Er hatte viel gelesen; und so bildete er sich ein er besitze Erfahrung und Klugheit; er legte nicht den leisesten Zweifel dass alle seine Voraussetzungen richtig seien; er ahnte nicht dass das Leben unendlich mannigfaltig ist, und sich niemals wiederholt."

So, to live is more than to read, and one might *know* all things and miss of everything. And so, if life is endlessly manifold, we may hope for good and great things, here or hereafter.

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Feb. 16, '87.

Do you mean to say you have the bobolink already? No bobby would be fool enough to come *here* yet awhile. It is midwinter; except that we have less sunshine, even, now — and

mud instead of snow. When the bobolinks have come and the bluebirds and the song sparrows — oh my! For my part I am meditating flight to Colorado Springs for the months of March and April — Mrs. Sill and me. Join us? Knowest anything about Colorado in spring? I don't; but it can't be worse than Ohio. Gastritis? I don't know it — by name; but I guess I must have had it for some two months now. Does it stand for indigestion (or un-digestion), mysterious sorenesses and aches all over one's corporality; symptoms of all the horrid diseases one has ever read about; fathomless depression of spirits; wide-awake nightmares from daylight to breakfast time, planning out the details of all the woes that are imminent to body and mind?

If such as these thy spirit move, then come with me and be my — fellow patient.

It's a hard thing to find out any exact fact in this world. No man, woman or book can tell the least about what degree of the thermometer one can expect in Colorado in March. Do you not need to cut and run somewhere? Could n't you leave for a month or six weeks? "He that fights and runs away shall live to fight another day," you know. I think we shall start in about a week. Write me quickly how you do. Who is your doctor? I saw Dr. A. L. Loomis in New York. He is first-class.

We are coming to last things. The note below to Aldrich was his last communication with an editor, as the note that follows was probably the last he wrote to anybody, and the visit to New York was his last journey from home except that to the hospital where he died. Of this farewell visit to Gotham Mr. Holt wrote in a letter sometime later: —

“The ‘*odi profanum vulgus et arceo*’ of another poet, used to be, to a marked degree, his feeling. When he was in New York, a few weeks before his death, all this had become wonderfully changed. He was at a hotel on Fifth Avenue, and astonished me by appearing in a high hat. He told me that he had come for needed rest after caring for sick friends.

“I said, still more astonished: ‘Why, some years ago, you told me that the rush of life in New York actually made you physically ill; and you gave that as your reason for hurrying through here once without even coming to see me.’

“He answered: ‘Yes, it used to be so. I was thoroughly morbid. I understand it all now. But I’ve outgrown it. I don’t want any better recreation now than to sit here and watch the stream of life go by.’

“Many other things united with this to satisfy me that he had at last become a citizen

of the real world, instead of trying to live in worlds that he tried to make for himself."

CUYAHOGA FALLS, O., Feb. 9, 1887.

MY DEAR MR. A——, —Thank you for the Club manuscript. I am sorry to have troubled you about it.

Thank you, too, for your friendly incitement as to writing. I shall be glad to pay heed thereto as soon as I can get into working order again. For two months I have been quite out of sorts. I am just back from a fortnight in New York, where some medical advice *and* some Wagner operas, and eke some symphonies, did me good; and I hope to be bombarding you with proses and verses before long.

Heartily yours,

E. R. SILL.

The Devil was well; the  
Devil a poet would be:  
The Devil fell sick, and  
Devil a poet was he!

CUY. FALLS, Feb. 23, '87.

I find we are to be delayed about going to Colorado Springs for two weeks probably. This interval I shall spend in Cleveland, attending to some necessary business there. I hope to hear from you there — address P. O. Do you think you're well enough yet to be

trotting around the country lecturing? Yet it has compensations of good mental effect on body. Probably all you need is outdoor air and fun. A bluebird heard here yesterday and a peewee! Frosty for their poor little toes! What do you know of Colorado in April and May? Florida is damp, malarious, and nothing to *do*, I hear.

Yours,

E. R. SILL.

The end was unexpected and shocking. Sill had gone up to Cleveland to the hospital, there to undergo a minor operation which was performed about February 24. It was apparently a success and he seemed to be recovering, when, whether as a result of oversight on the part of the nurse in charge, or of some unexpected weakness in his constitution, he suffered a relapse and died on the 27th.



## IX

### AVE ATQUE VALE

SILL's death left his friends inconsolable; so incomplete his life, so needless seemed his end. They were so confident, so happily expectant, of his future, and now, cut off in the full exercise of his growing power, he was gone, "and hath not left his peer." So it seemed to them in 1887, — he was to them the fittest to carry forward the torch of poetry. Not that he had achieved his fame: that has been growing since, he might in fact have described himself without bitterness, in the words Hawthorne had used forty years earlier, as "the most obscure man of letters in America." He had cared little for fame: fame had cared as little for him; and outside a small group of discerning lovers of poetry the name of Sill was unknown in the world of letters.

It is perhaps an idle question to ask why to his friends the sense of loss was so poignant. Was it not enough that he was gone and they were the poorer? But the quick, eager spirit was so untimely taken off, before its full fruitage and expression. All the unfulfilled promise of his nature loomed before them as a tangible

loss. They knew he had not beat his music out; nor fully conquered his old inhibitions and the checks and hamperings of doubt. It was plain that he had not gained serenity, and had never resolved into moral unity that duality and conflict of temperament which prevented full-throated song. The unrest and barrenness of the time, the chill of doubt, the aggressive agnosticism of his generation had often laid constraint upon him. But they had seen him emerging into fuller power; they felt the growing sweep of mind, the firmer hold on life and its meanings; they looked in confidence for fuller tones, for a more sustained and loftier song.

Were they deceived? I think not. The figure that emerges in the letters and autobiographical jottings is that of a finely tempered, aspiring spirit, attuned to all ideals — loving truth and emulous of perfection, continuing the struggle from year to year to gain mastery of his resources and his art.

It is a very engaging figure. In his prime as in his youth he was a handsome man, slender, straight, and alert. He had abundant brown hair, large, melancholy gray eyes, and a face rather pale. He gave the impression always of a refined, delicate, even somewhat fragile, creature, so that Howells, who saw him but once, remembers him as “a still, shy, delicate

presence." By the time he was forty he had had several break-downs from overwork, and had established habits of cautious regard for his health which of course reacted upon his attitude toward life. His movements were quick and precise, all his nerves and muscles being apparently most accurate in their adjustments. His laugh was spontaneous and contagious, his face was mobile, and his talk was illustrated with inconspicuous but frequent gesture. For all his fragile health he was an outdoors man, fond of trees and fields, keenly observant of leaf and flower; bird and beast. He has himself given us some hints of his personal peculiarities in one of his little essays originally printed in the "Atlantic."

"For my own part, at least, I like to know that I am not so eccentric as I may have feared in various little 'tricks and manners' of my body or my mind. I am always pleased to meet people who wear their thumbs inside their shut hand; and who have square-toed shoes; and who like the taste of some cates when a little burnt; and who reluct at shaking hands; and who never sharpen the lead of a pencil; and who say 'good-morning' to the servants; and who reject the use of a spoon as being a thing to take powders in, or the milder nourishments of helpless infancy."

But singularly enough the most striking

portrait of Sill I have found is in a brief description of an English poet who died in the same year that Sill graduated from college. I mean that remarkable prototype of the American poet — Arthur Hugh Clough — whose biographer writes of him: —

“His was a character not easy to describe, whose charm was so personal that it seems to evaporate when translated into words. He was a singular combination of enthusiasm and calmness, of thoughtfulness and imagination, of speech and silence, of seriousness and humor. . . .

“On special occasions he would pour out the accumulation of his mind, but most often the stream remained hid, and only came to the surface in his poetry, or in little incisive phrases, most apt to engrave themselves sharply on the minds of his hearers. . . . His poems tell us of his perplexities, his divided thoughts, his uncertainties; those who remember him will think rather of his simple directness of speech and action, the clearness of his judgment on any moot point; above all, it is remarkable how unanimous all those who knew him are in expressing their feeling of his entire nobleness, his utter purity of character.”

This was the man to whom Sill might have addressed a poem that tells so much of himself: —

*To the Unknown Soul*

O soul, that somewhere art my very kin,  
From dusk and silence unto thee I call:  
I know not where thou dwellest: if within  
A palace or a hut; if great or small  
Thy state and store of fortune; if thou'rt sad  
This moment, or most glad;  
The lordliest monarch or the lowest thrall.

But well I know — since thou'rt my counterpart —  
Thou bear'st a clouded spirit; full of doubt  
And old misgiving, heaviness of heart  
And loneliness of mind; long wearied out  
With climbing stairs that lead to nothing sure,  
With chasing lights that lure,  
In the thick murk that wraps us all about.

As across many instruments a flute  
Breathes low, and only thrills its selfsame tone,  
That wakes in music while the rest are mute,  
So send thy voice to me: Then I alone  
Shall hear and answer; and we two will fare  
Together, and each bear  
Twin burdens, lighter now than either one.

The longing for perfect companionship — the verses just quoted were originally a pendant to a brief essay entitled "Wanted — A Friend" — was a phase of his wistful idealism. Not that he was without friends. Never man had warmer, more loyal, or more steadfast friends. Besides that first intimate, Damon and Pythias relation, closer than a brother's, with his classmate Shearer, which beginning in college lasted throughout Shearer's life, there



were his friendships with Williams and Dexter and Baldwin and Holt, of the Yale group, with Palmer and Kellogg and Royce and McLean, of California, not one of which was broken till death severed the tie. His capacity for friendship lay partly in a flashing responsiveness, a lightning readiness to catch another's thought and join in sympathetic understanding. Says his friend Williams: "I never knew anybody else who caught one's idea so promptly as he. In all our talks on innumerable topics, I never had in a single instance to explain my meaning to Sill. He anticipated my idea before it was half expressed. And it was so in the case of everybody with whom he came in contact." Holt says: "Sill and Shearer did more for the culture and character of the class than did all the rest of the college, faculty included."

Deeper than this lay what was the central and dominant motive of his life — the desire to serve. Just as his mind ran to meet another's thought, his whole nature ran to meet another's need. He longed to help. The desire runs like a refrain through his poems —

"I would be satisfied if I might tell  
Before I go,  
That one warm word, — how I have loved them well,  
Could they but know!  
And would have gained for them some gleam of good:  
Have sought it long; still seek, — if but I could!  
Before I go."

It runs no less plain and strong through his life. "I often think," he writes from Cuyahoga Falls, "when I fidget after doing more work and more good — Oh, well. One must n't hope for the chance to do too much more than the average man. Now the average man does n't do *anything*." And again, "I am busy getting up a village aid society — awful weather for poor people without even potatoes and no blankets. Also making a new campaign for my struggling village library. . . . It's a hard world to really do anything in — but Lord, how easy to *talk*!"

This was the spirit that led him to send out his poems unsigned and made him shrink from any collection of them into a book. He feared and hated mere publicity. I shall not attempt to appraise his work. Most of it is lyric and stamped with the mood of the singer: no single work ample in plan, of large design and sustained power of execution arrests the attention. Yet the "Collected Poems," together with the volume of selected "Prose," form no inconsiderable achievement in authorship. And it is of a definite type; the seal of New England is upon it all — the mark of restraint, clarity and moral elevation. Already time is sifting it, and some, perhaps much, of it will disappear; but much bids fair to last. Certain

of his shorter poems like "Truth at Last," "Life," "Sibylline Bartering," "The Things that will not Die," "The Secret," have been widely quoted and reprinted in a score of forms, often without any reference to their authorship; in many cases it is likely with no idea of their author's name or history. His two most generally known poems — those we mentioned at the beginning of this record — "Opportunity" and "The Fool's Prayer," are known by thousands of people who have been chastened by them and had their hearts lifted up and their spirits purified by them, yet have never heard of their author. That is as he would have wished. He would have accepted his own doctrine: —

"Let the great forces, wise of old,  
Have their whole way with thee,  
Crumble thy heart from its hold,  
Drown thy life in the sea.  
And æons hence, some day,  
The love thou gavest a child,  
The dream in a midnight wild,  
The word thou wouldst not say —  
Or in a whisper no one dared to hear,  
Shall gladden the earth and bring the golden year."

Sill came of Puritan stock; he was of the best New England strain; he was trained, as his father before him, at Yale. It is enough to say that he was bred true to type. He came from the proud little town of Windsor. She may

gladly record his name among her sons: for he is fit to hold a place with her best — with the Wolcotts, the Allyns, the Rowlands, the Edwardses, the Grants, and the Ellsworths. They would not deny him a place in their company, — not the procession of the Wolcotts, gracious gentlemen all, nor Jonathan Edwards the great theologian who towered in intellect above his contemporaries like a mountain peak, nor even the Chief Justice who stood worthily beside Washington himself. They all served their day and generation, and their descendant and fellow townsman bore himself like one of them.

THE END





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